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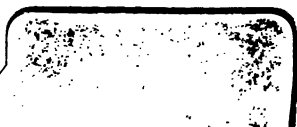
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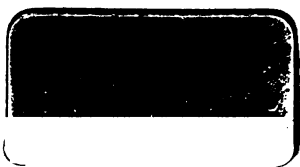


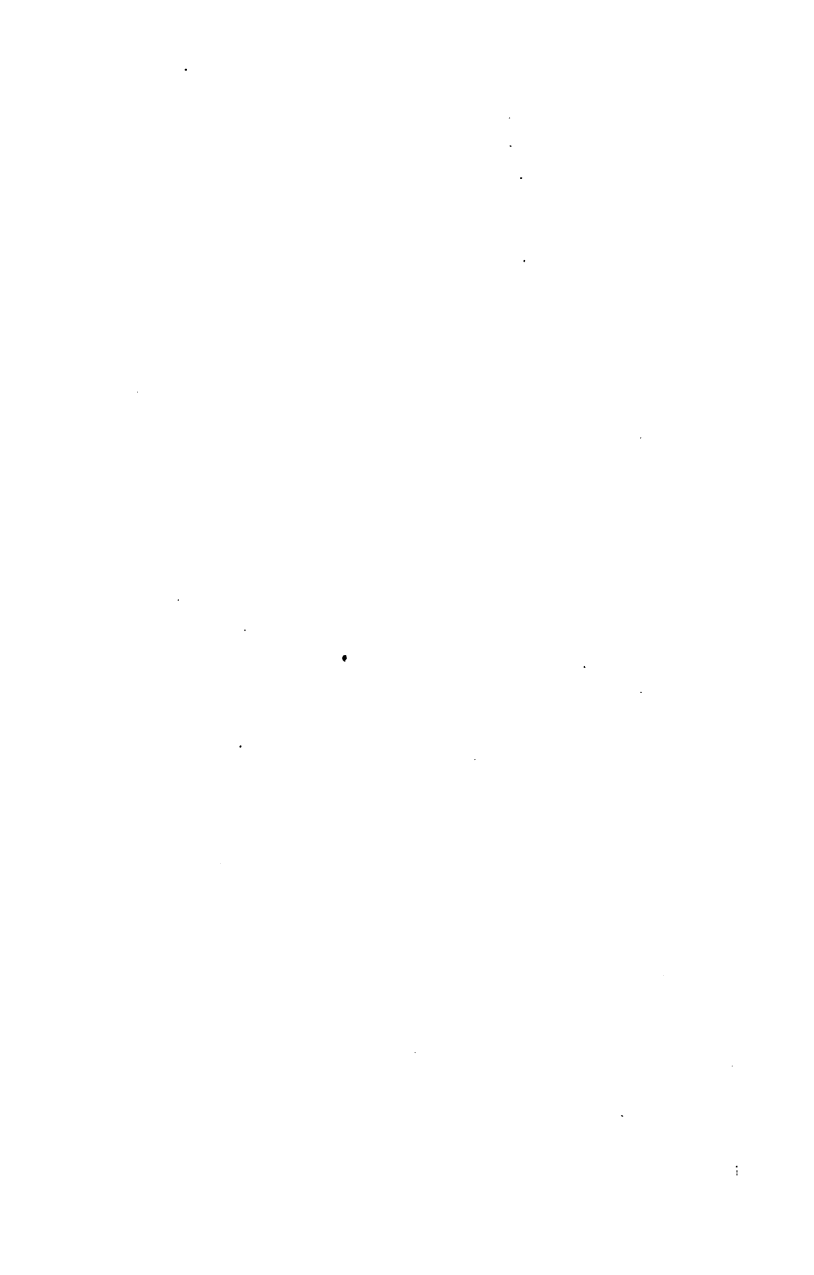
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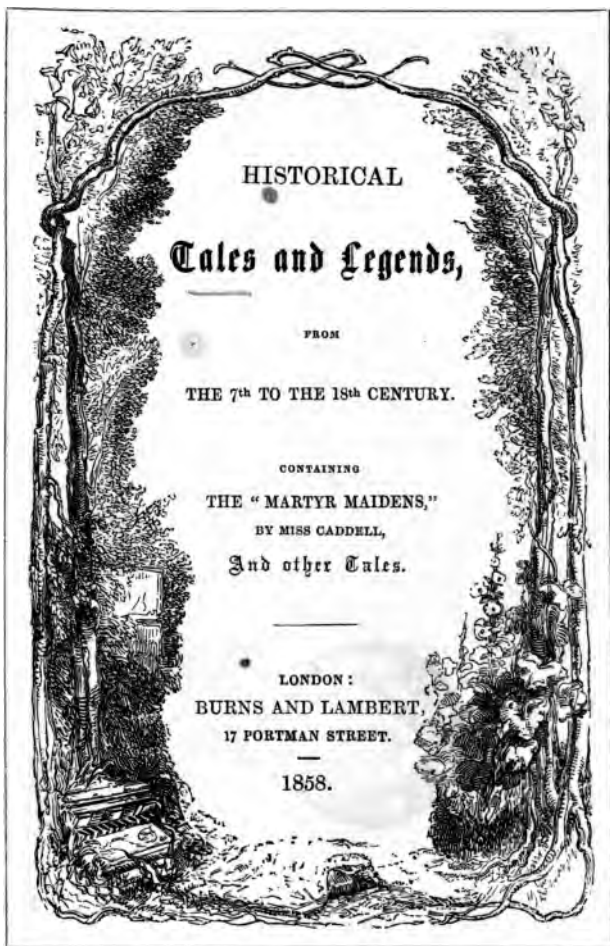


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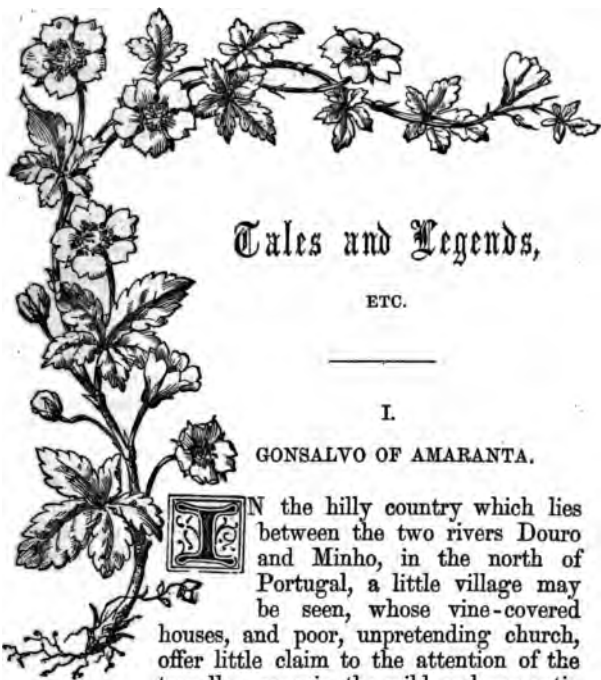
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I.

GONSALVO OF AMARANTA.

IN the hilly country which lies between the two rivers Douro and Minho, in the north of Portugal, a little village may be seen, whose vine-covered houses, and poor, unpretending church, offer little claim to the attention of the traveller, save in the wild and romantic beauty which they share with so many other similar scenes in the southern peninsula. Yet the village of San Pajo has one association which gives it a dignity and an interest above that which attaches to many a lovelier and more important place; for once it was the residence of a Saint. Few changes probably have passed over it, as it lies in its green nest among the rocky arms of the Sierra de Gerez; and we may fancy how those winding paths that lead up to the mountains among the silver olive-groves that cluster round their sides, were trodden by the very feet of him who, six hundred years ago, was its parish-priest. He came here very young, a

mere boy, as you would have called him, to see his fair face and slight form; but those who so early laid on him the cure of souls, well knew that a more than ordinary sanctity was in the soul of Gonsalvo (for so he was called), that fitted him for the charge, and that something of the grace of the supernatural life had rested on him since childhood. Gonsalvo had accepted the charge of his parish less from the hands of the bishop than from those of the Most Blessed Virgin, to whom he had consecrated himself from early years. With something of a child's dependence and simplicity, he looked to her to lead him by the hand, and show him how to feed and govern his little flock; and the virtues which seem to shine most brightly in the life he led among his people, made it evident that her influence over his heart was the true and close one of a mother; for poverty, purity, and humility were the companions with whom he dwelt.

His house stood close to the church; a rude peasant's cottage it was, with nothing to distinguish it from those that surrounded it, and perhaps displaying less of comfort or the appearance of care. The beggars stopped with a kind of confidence at its little wicket-gate, which they looked on as their home; for they knew that they were welcome visitors to the holy curé. Poverty to him was the livery of his Lord; and bringing them into his house, he would wait on them with his own hands, and reverently wash those poor weary feet with tears of love and pity as he thought of One who, in scarcely better guise, had gone up and down the rough hills of Judea, and who was present to him in the persons of His poor. A village curate's life has little of incident or change; and Gonsalvo passed many years amid its quiet duties which have left no trace on the page of history. He lived for God and for His people; and yet, generous and unreserved as was his devotion to his pastoral charge, something lay unsatisfied in his heart. What it was he scarcely knew,—he could not put it into words; and very often he would

strive to thrust it from him as a temptation, which was sent to divert him from his round of daily duty, and fill him with an undefined disquietude. Yet there it was,—a kind of voice in his soul that ever whispered to him of something more; a finger that always seemed to beckon him a little further on, away from the pastures of that village-home, and the sweetness of its unruffled tranquillity, into strange lands, where he might seek for that which, whilst still he could not name it, he was every day feeling to be more and more the want of his soul.

It was a summer's evening; and the glow of the fast-fading daylight fell through the western casement of the little church of San Pajo, and gave its last lustre to the image of the Blessed Virgin, before which Gonsalvo might be seen kneeling in the attitude of one whose heart was ill at ease.

He gazed up into the marble face that looked on him with such a quiet sweetness, as though he found in its maternal smile the answer to all his troubled thoughts. "What wouldst thou have me do?" were the words which broke involuntarily from his lips; "for even when I look at thee, do I hear the voice which whispers me to go; and I know not whither thou wouldst send me. Sleep has gone from mine eyes, and the joy which in old time satisfied my soul has fled away, and still thou wilt not suffer me to rest; oh, that but once the voice would speak aloud to my ears, and declare to me thy will, that I might know at length what thou wouldst have me to do!" Perhaps it was the shadow of the departing twilight that flickered over the face of the statue, or perhaps the tears that gathered in his eyes dimmed Gonsalvo's sight; but it seemed to him that the lips of Mary moved as though in speech, and a word fell upon his ears; he knew not whence it came, yet he took it as the answer he had craved, and it sounded like "*Jerusalem*." That one word seemed to give light to his soul: his was the age of pilgrimage, and the Sepulchre of the Redeemer was the home

towards which all Christian hearts were yearning. Travelling was a different thing then to what it now is; and yet men thought it little to cross the seas, and find their way over pathless rugged mountains, and perhaps to beg their way through a foreign and hostile country, that they might lay their pilgrim's-staff beside the sepulchre of their Lord. It was the great work of penance of those days; and the twelve centuries that had passed away had destroyed nothing of the tenderness of that tie which bound the heart of Christendom to the tomb of Christ. Gonsalvo rose with a clear purpose in his soul, and with a hope more buoyant than he had felt for many months, that he should find the thing his heart had so long been seeking in a pilgrimage to the holy shrine.

A very short time sufficed for his preparations; they were less for himself than for the comfort of his people in his absence, for his courage failed him a little at the thought of leaving them; and but for the deep conviction that he was but following a Divine call, he could scarcely have found the strength to abandon them. One human tie of kindred had been granted him, which had a close hold on his heart. The death of an elder brother had left him in charge of his only child, to whom he had given the care and affection of a father. He had received holy orders at an early age; and it was to him that Gonsalvo determined, with the permission of the Bishop, to intrust the care of his parish, in the hopes that his presence might keep alive in the hearts of his flock the influence and remembrance of their absent pastor. And now he stood at his wicket-gate, with the rough habit and staff that formed the pilgrim's garb, and lingered a little before he turned his back on scenes that had made till now his only world. His nephew was by his side; and they both stood looking over the village, as it lay with its vines and pastures bathed in the dew of an early summer morning.

"Antonio," said his uncle, "I leave these few

sheep in the wilderness with a heavy heart : and thou art but young to feed them ; yet was I not older than thyself when first I came among them."

"And I, good father, have dwelt among them since a child," replied the youth, "and have grown up on your own teaching, even as though I were your son. It seems to me as though all things here were so familiar with the thought of you, that it will be as if you were still present in the old places, and I shall not feel alone or without a guide."

"Child," returned Gonsalvo, "thou thinkest so now ; yet, who can tell ? It may be, a year hence thou wilt not desire other guide than thine own will ; and as yet thou canst scarcely tell where that may lead. Perchance thou thinkest it much to be master here, and order all things as thou wilt ; yet, if thou hast had happy days among these hills, it were well for thee to remember the secret of their happiness,—for they were ever seasoned to thee by poverty and prayer."

"You doubt me, father," said Antonio, a little hastily ; but Gonsalvo laid his hand on his shoulder, and looked at him with a glance of trust and affection which seemed to shame him for the thought.

"I do not doubt you, my son," he said ; "I was but thinking that till now the priest's house of San Pajo has been termed 'the Beggar's Home,' and I doubted how the title might suit the ears of its new master. But I did thee wrong for even that mistrust ; thou wilt surely care for the poor wanderers better than I have done, and not the less for the thought of thine uncle, who may chance to be begging his bread from a strange hand in a like manner, and it may be will one day lie unknown at his own door, like the holy Alexis."

Antonio fell at his feet with tears and many a protest of fidelity to his trust ; and having given him his blessing for the last time, Gonsalvo at length set out on the mountain-road that was to lead him across the Spanish frontier.

Time passed on ; and though at first Antonio missed

the guidance of the hand which till now had so tenderly supported him, by degrees Gonsalvo's parting words seemed to find their fulfilment. There was a pleasure in the new feeling of freedom and the gratification of his own will, which stole on him insensibly; and when at the year's end Gonsalvo's return was still delayed, and no tidings concerning him reached San Pajo, his prolonged absence caused a secret satisfaction to the heart of his nephew, even whilst he would fain have persuaded himself that it filled him with regret. Then the revenues of the parish, and those attached to the canon's stall of Braga, which Gonsalvo held, came pouring in, and Antonio discovered with surprise that his uncle was a wealthy man. And he began to look at the bare ruinous walls of his little house with a contemptuous surprise, to think how one who could have lived so well and easily should have chosen instead a peasant's fare and dwelling; and the title of "the Beggar's Home" was getting every day more and more distasteful to his ears. Another year, and still no news of Gonsalvo; and Antonio was getting used to think of the parish as his own, and to form for the spending of his revenues plans, alas! which were all for his own pleasure, and wherein the poor, whom Gonsalvo had been wont to make his bankers, had now but little share. Another and another year rolled on; men had almost forgotten Gonsalvo's name; the poor humble master of the Beggar's Home stood little chance of being remembered by the side of the gay Abbé of San Pajo, as Antonio was now universally styled. Yet, so long as he felt that title was his own by courtesy only, he felt his position might any day be changed; and full of this tormenting thought, he constantly revolved in his mind how he could place himself above the chance of a reverse which would deprive him of all his present means of ease and enjoyment. Gonsalvo's lengthened absence gave a ready suggestion, on which he was not long in profiting. A rumour began to circulate of his death; and letters, it was said, had been received from

Palestine which confirmed the tale, and furnished every particular. The archbishop himself was deceived, and prepared to fill the vacant benefice; and it seemed but a fitting testimony of respect to his venerable memory to choose as his successor one who had stood to him in the relation of a son. In short, before the termination of the fourth year from Gonsalvo's departure, his nephew had been solemnly inducted into the benefice, which it was said had been left vacant by the death of its late saintly occupant, and Antonio's utmost wishes were fulfilled. The thirteenth century (at which period the circumstances of which we are speaking took place) was a miserable time for Portugal. Long civil wars, followed by the reign of a weak and incapable prince, Sancho II., had left the kingdom a prey to innumerable factions, amid which all law was disregarded, and every part of society became infected by the universal corruption. In this general decay of morals, the new Abbé of San Pajo found plenty to countenance him in the career of license and extravagance to which he now abandoned himself. The patrimony which formerly had supported widows and orphans was now lavished on dogs, horses, and falcons. The little cottage was replaced by a luxurious dwelling, from whose door the poor were thrust away; and as things grew daily worse and worse, the people ceased not to deplore the loss of their old pastor, whom, in common with the rest of the world, they mourned as dead.

Fourteen years had passed since Antonio's settlement at San Pajo, when one evening a pilgrim was seen coming down the mountain-road that led to the village,—no unusual spectacle in old times, when the priest's house offered a sure shelter to all such travellers, yet one not often seen of late; for the reputation of the new abbé had made them shy of the road that passed his inhospitable door. And this one was from the Holy Land; his broad hat bore the palmer's shell, his feet were bare, and worn with long journeyings, and the lines of his pale and wasted face were those rather of

austerity than of age. Fourteen years of penance and pilgrimage had left too great a change on Gonsalvo's appearance to make him easily recognised; and those who passed him as he stood leaning on his staff on the brow of the hill, looking with swimming eyes over the nouse which lay below, never gave the ragged dusty stranger a second glance. What kind of thoughts were in his heart as he stood there, calling to mind, as though it were but yesterday, the morning when, not far from that very spot, he had given his parting blessing to Antonio, and set out on his long and weary journey? How many a sick longing after home had there been amid the hours of captivity and delay that had come on him since then! And the peace of his soul still wanting, the desire as great and as unsatisfied as ever, the whisper of that voice making itself heard louder and louder in every sacred spot and holy shrine; neither home nor pilgrimage had yet given him the reply; and as he slowly descended the hill towards his old dwelling, something rose within him like a warning, that it was not there he should find it, and that his resting-place was still, as ever, "a little further on."

He stood before the house, which, indeed, had little but its situation by which he could recognise it as the same. "Is this the priest's house, good friend?" he inquired of a villager who was passing by.

"Surely it is so," was the reply; "yet were I in thy shoes, good palmer, I would think twice ere I touched the latch of yonder door. Its master has small love for men in thy garb; and thy scallop-shell will scarce make thy rags and alms-box the more welcome."

"And who is the abbé?" continued Gonsalvo; for the thought flashed across him that perhaps Antonio might be dead, and so the place had passed into the hands of an unworthy stranger.

"The *abbé*," answered the villager with a sneer, "likes better to be called Don Antonio de Souza. I warrant you he loves the huntsman's cap better than the priest's frock; and to speak truth, the one fits him

better than the other. There goes the Psalm-chant which finds most favour in his ears," he continued, as the loud bay of a hound was heard from within the enclosure; "there are rare pensioners now in the Beggar's Home."

Those familiar words shot into Gonsalvo's heart like an agony; and without reply he turned from the speaker, and raising the latch of the door without further ceremony, he stood within the entrance-hall. It was a moment he had often pictured to himself; but how strange a contrast to all his cherished fancies did he find the reality! A table stood in the middle of the hall covered with glasses and the remains of the evening meal, and round it sat several men whose dress and bearing inspired him with a feeling of disgust. Among them was one who seemed the master of the revels, and in whose countenance, despite of the alteration which had come from long habits of license and dissipation, Gonsalvo recognised with anguish the features of his nephew. He wore a huntsman's dress, and no vestige of his sacred calling was visible either in his appearance or manner. The entrance of Gonsalvo disturbed the company, who looked up with a lazy surprise: he did not advance further from the entrance; but stood leaning on his staff, and gazing at the scene before him with a sad and severe countenance.

"Whom have we here?" cried Antonio at length, after a stare at his new visitor. "There was small ceremony in your entrance, Sir Palmer; let there be as little in your departure. Get you gone, sirrah, and quickly too, ere I show you the way out with less of courtesy than you may chance to like."

But Gonsalvo never moved; he fixed his eyes on his nephew's face, and uttered but one word—"Antonio!" And the tone, soft and gentle as it was, fell on the abbé's ear like a thunderclap; for it was one he could not mistake. The sudden pallor of his cheek betrayed his agitation, as he started to his feet, exclaiming: "Who art thou, fellow, to make so free with

my name? Begone, I say, ere I teach thee manners with my stick!"

"Who am I, saidst thou?" replied Gonsalvo, as he came slowly into the circle; "I am the master of this house, and thine uncle, unhappy boy; and thou needest not have asked my name, for thou knewest it when first I spoke. How do I find thee, Antonio? The rags and palmer's hat do not change me as thou art changed, yea, in thy very soul, which once was pure and innocent as a child's, and now—"

"A pretty tale," interrupted Antonio, who had quickly determined on the part he should take; "Gonsalvo, my uncle, as all the world knows, has been dead for many years; thou art but a poor impostor, and hast scarcely learnt thy lesson right. Out, I say again, or the dogs shall hunt thee to cover;" and snatching up the hunting-whip that lay by his side, he whistled to two great bloodhounds who lay on the floor, and who at the sound raised their ears, and seemed ready to carry his threat into execution.

Gonsalvo paused: it was certainly no feeling of fear that made him hesitate; but something of a doubtful purpose seemed to mingle with the anguish of that moment. Then the doubt vanished, and he spoke again: "Antonio," he said, "I will give thee yet a chance; for my heart yearns after thee even still, and it may be thou findest it hard to part from house and lands which thou hast called thine own for fourteen years. Keep them, child, if such be thy will; but let me, ere I go, but once hear thee speak in thine old tone, and call me father."

"A rare father!" said one of the abbé's companions, who till now had been silent spectators of the scene. "Why, Antonio, I marvel you dally with the old vagrant; I would long ago have loosed the dogs at him, or have tried what a cut of the whip might have done in the matter. His paternity would move a little faster with Sebastian at his heels;" and at the sound of his name the dog uttered a low growl.

"Hast thou no answer, Antonio?" said his uncle sorrowfully, and without heeding the other's interruption; "the lands, yea, all that I have, are thine, so thou wilt give me back thy broken faith, thy perjured guilty soul, to be mine own again."

"Thou art too bold," exclaimed the abbé, who feared lest his companions might really suspect the truth of Gonsalvo's tale if he suffered the scene to last much longer. "Out, I say again, or I will hound thee from the village;" and whirling the long whip above his head, he let the lash fall with a terrific cut on the person of the pilgrim. A loud laugh from the others showed their approbation of the action; and coming to the aid of their companion with many an oath and word of blasphemy, they thrust him to the door; and flinging him over the threshold, Gonsalvo heard the bolts drawn, and felt that all hope of softening the heart of Antonio was at an end. What should he do? There was the Bishop; and it would not be difficult to prove his identity to him, and to get justice done him, and its righteous penalties inflicted on the worthless intruder. But no such thought was in Gonsalvo's mind, as he turned his back once more on the valley which but an hour since he had entered as his home. "Not there," he murmured to himself; "I thought not it would be thus, and yet I knew the rest would not be there; my foot is yet in the wilderness, and the promised land is far as ever from mine eyes."

Sunk in sad and bitter reflections he walked on, hardly knowing in what direction he was going; and night-fall overtook him in a wild and desolate region about three leagues from the banks of the Douro. No sign of human habitation was near, the barren heights of the Sierra rose on every side; but the valley in which he stood was green and beautiful, being watered by the river Tamaga, which flowed from the mountains and joined the larger stream of the Douro further down. The rocks at the base of the mountain were broken, and in some places hollowed into caves; and in one of

these Gonsalvo resolved to take up his lodging for the night. But it was scarcely to sleep: he lay on the mossy turf thinking over the events of the day, weeping bitterly when he thought of Antonio, and yet with something in his heart that told him it was not *his* hand alone that had driven him from the door. "The will of God was not there," he said, as his thoughts spoke half-aloud; "hath He not said, that some He will lead to the wilderness, and there speak to their hearts?" And as he listened to the quiet ripple of the mountain-stream, and the low night-wind sighing among the trees, their friendly voices sounded sweet and pleasant in his ears, and soothed away the echoes of those curses which had rung in them ever since he had turned from the doors of San Pajo. "The voice of God is in the waters," he murmured; "and it biddeth me rest awhile on the spot where He has led me. Here are no false hearts and broken faith of men; here will I abide: and it takes but little to change the pilgrim's habit to the hermit's coat."

As soon as day dawned, he set about the task of constructing a little cell where he might dwell; and in which he resolved to remain, without taking further steps to declare his return and prove the truth of his story. In a few weeks he had added to his hermitage a little chapel of the rudest construction, which he dedicated to the Mother of God; and it was not long before the news went round the neighbouring country, that a hermit of extraordinary sanctity had taken up his residence in the valley of the Tamaga. The sweetness of his new life grew on him day by day, and effaced the memory of his sufferings; the wilderness blossomed like a rose, for its solitude was full of God. Prayer, and the work which was necessary to obtain his scanty subsistence, divided his time; the echoes of the rocks gave back the sound of the Divine office which he chanted amid the silence, and his little chapel was *blessed with the celebration of the Divine mysteries.* *In time he became so enamoured of his desert, that*

the fate which had driven him from his home seemed no longer a hard one; and it seemed as though Gonsalvo were at last at rest. By degrees the fame of his sanctity drew numbers to visit him in his cell; the valley of Amaranta, as his retreat was called, became the resort of all who desired counsel or direction, and Gonsalvo saw his life of solitude gradually changed to one of apostolic labour. Obedient to the call which summoned him to duties he had never sought, he preached through the whole surrounding country; and the sweet odour of his charities and prayers, extending beyond the limits of his little wilderness, diffused their blessed influence over the whole region of the *Tras os Montes*, and vast numbers were converted to a life of penance and devotion.

We have seen Gonsalvo in many positions,—as parish-priest and as pilgrim, as hermit and apostle; but the end was not yet. Through all these changes that passed over his life, the same voice made itself heard as in old time; and he knew that even yet he was not brought into the haven where he should be. The hope so long deferred had brought with it a profound submission to the will of God; and yet he ceased not to implore a clearer light to know where that will would lead him on at last. One night, after many hours spent in prayer, he lay down to rest on the stone-floor of his little chapel before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, where stood a rude image of the Divine Mother, carved by his own hand out of the rock. He had scarcely fallen asleep when he was roused by a brilliant light, more dazzling than the sun; and starting to his feet, he beheld standing on the right of the altar the form of Mary herself, and her aspect was mild and gracious, as though she had come to be the messenger of peace.

Gonsalvo threw himself at her feet: “Lady of my soul,” he said, “is the hour come at last?”

“It is come, Gonsalvo,” said a voice whose music was sweeter far than the melodies of earth, and filled him with a flood of overwhelming joy; “the life thou

hast led here was but to prepare thee for the end, and I am come to call thee to the house where the will of God awaits thee. Know then, that thou shalt never find rest till thou art joined to an order dedicated to my service, which thou shalt know when thou hearest an office in my honour, which begins and ends with the *Ave Maria*. Go, then, and seek thy place of rest; and when thou hast found it, thou shalt have found the way in which thou mayest serve God perfectly until death."

The vision was gone, and Gonsalvo was alone again. When morning dawned, he laid aside his hermit's dress; and once more taking up his pilgrim's-staff, prepared to set out on his new wanderings in obedience to the command he had received. His life had been so peaceable and happy in his little hermitage, that it was not without a sigh he turned his back on the green and pleasant valley, and went out once more into the world that lay beyond his desert, "not knowing whither he went." Up and down the hills of Portugal he wandered for many a month, every night seeking a lodging from the hospitable doors of some of the many convents that then covered the face of the country; and with weary longing ears he listened to the recital of our Lady's Office, in the vain hope of catching those words which should be the signal to him of rest.

At length, one evening found him near Guimares, a town not far from his old hermitage; and according to his custom, he asked of a passer-by whether there were no monastery in the neighbourhood where he might ask shelter for the night. The man to whom he put the question seemed scarcely inclined for a very courteous reply: "We have no monks here," he answered, surlily; "unless you call the new-fashioned friars yonder by such a name."

"And who are they?" said Gonsalvo, who had been about to turn away in disappointment, but was recalled by the latter part of the sentence.

"*The Friars of Mary* some call them," said the

man; "friars-preachers, as they call themselves—friars-beggars, I say, were a better name; and beggar treatment they should have, did I rule the land."

"Beggar!" thought Gonsalvo, and the word was full of home to his ears; "then I will surely try the beggars' home, whatever it may be. I would pray you to show me where I may find these friars' convent," he said aloud, addressing his companion; "I am a stranger here, and can scarce guess my way."

"Convent," said the man, with a contemptuous laugh; "why, look down yonder, where you see the grey mound by the river-side: some where among the stones and rubbish you will find the convent; a community, methinks, of bats and moles were the fittest for such a hole: and that patched habit," he added, eyeing the pilgrim with no very flattering glance, "may chance to suit their taste."

Gonsalvo looked in the direction pointed out, and saw indeed on the opposite bank of the river a rude heap of building, which presented a spectacle almost justifying the sneering description bestowed on it by the speaker. But the aspect of its almost squalid poverty, far from repelling him, attracted him with a wonderful power; and crossing the little bridge that separated him from the town, he in a few moments stood at the door of the strange convent. A ruinous house formed the centre of the building; but later additions had been made on either side, extending, however, no higher than the second story, the basement being formed of a narrow cloister, whilst the rooms that were ranged over it were rudely constructed of turf and stones cemented together with mud. The whole of the erection was scarcely superior in style to his own hermitage of Amaranta; and yet, poor and humble as it was, Gonsalvo felt there was something about its look which might inspire you with devotion. His signal soon brought the porter to the door; he wore a white tunic and scapular, such as Gonsalvo had never seen before, and his appearance corresponded

with the austere and simple character of the place. "May it please you," said Gonsalvo, "I am a poor pilgrim, who would crave a night's lodging under your roof for the love of God. They told me yonder that the Friars of Mary were not wont to drive away the beggars from their door."

"You are welcome, brother," said the friar, to whom a single glance had revealed enough to persuade him that the pilgrim was worthy of his trust,—"that is, if you be content with hard fare and lodging; for the friars-preachers have little luxury to offer to their guests; but you must speak to the father-prior. A pilgrim, and, as I guess, from the Holy Land, has a sure claim on his hospitality."

As he spoke, he led Gonsalvo through the rough cloister into a room whose furniture consisted of a table and wooden bench, where a man sat writing, whose appearance riveted him at once, filling him with an emotion of reverence which induced him to kneel uncovered as he asked his blessing. And well might such a sentiment be aroused at the first sight of St. Peter Gonsalez, or, as he was then more commonly called, Saint Telmo, the Prior of Guimares. The nobility of his natural bearing made itself perceived even under the poor religious habit which he wore, whilst none could doubt that in him the humility of the saint mingled with the courageous firmness of a Christian hero. When Gonsalvo rose from his knees, the two gazed in one another's countenances long and earnestly; and the instinct of the Divine Spirit, with which both were so richly endowed, revealed to each the secrets of holiness which lay buried in the soul of his companion.

"Thou wilt lodge here to-night, good pilgrim," said the prior; "and the hour of Compline is even now at hand. In the morning we must meet again; for surely there is much whereof thou and I must speak before we part."

The cell to which Gonsalvo was conducted was in the dormitory above the cloister of which we have

spoken; it was scarcely four feet wide, and being nearly open to the dormitory, the least noise outside could be distinctly heard by its occupant. As Gonsalvo lay on the rough bed which formed nearly the only furniture of the cell, he could catch the sound of the brethren's feet as they assembled in the dormitory to recite the Little Office of Our Lady, as is the custom in the order before retiring to rest; and then, at last, the welcome words broke on his ear: "*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.*" He listened, with a throbbing heart, till the recital should be finished; for he knew if the same salutation were repeated at its close, that the token given him by Mary was found, and his wanderings were at an end. And it was even so: Gonsalvo bowed his head in thankfulness, and murmured to himself, with inexpressible joy of heart, "*Hæc requies mea.*"

When next he appeared before the prior it was to solicit from him the holy habit of the order to which he had been so marvellously led,—a request which the Saint did not hesitate to grant when he learnt that the pilgrim, whose appearance had so attracted him the night before, was none other than the hermit Gonsalvo, whose saintly fame had long since reached the convent of Guimares. Another change therefore passed over his life; priest, pilgrim, and hermit, he saw himself enrolled among a community of brethren living in the first fervour of their institute, and under the guidance and government of a Saint. The perfection of his soul, trained in the school of suffering, soon became apparent to all; and a year after his profession in the order, it was determined to send him out to preach. The devotion of the people of Amaranta towards him, and the great fruit of souls which he had gained among them during his former residence, induced his superiors to choose that spot as the scene of his labours; and thus, after an absence of two years, he returned to his little hermitage, which continued his principal place of abode during the remainder of his life. The town of Amaranta which now

stands in the valley, which was then so sweet and lovely a wilderness, was first formed of the people who built huts and cottages round his grotto, that they might benefit from the neighbourhood of the Saint; and the bridge which spans the Tamaga, where it dashes over the high and precipitous rocks that rise round the valley, stands on the site of one which he built by the direction of an angel, and which cost him many years of incessant labour, in the course of which his miraculous powers were often displayed. On the 10th of January, 1259, voices were heard in all the country and villages round about, which said, "Arise, and go to the burial of the Saint." The people ran wondering through the streets, asking one another who was dead; and a common inspiration determined them to proceed to the hermitage of Amaranta, where indeed they found the venerable body of the aged man lying on the stone-floor surrounded by the community of Guimares, who had been called to witness his departure.

Such are the outlines of a history whose singular character makes us regret the imperfect details which have been preserved concerning one whose life exhibited by turns a picture of almost every religious vocation which we find separately in the lives of other Saints. And in all, we are told, "he lived without reproach"—well deserving, by the blind and childlike faith which guided him in his long and weary pilgrimages, of that sweet name at last by which it was then the privilege of the Dominican order to be popularly known—"The Friar of Mary."



II.

THE VICTORY OF MURET.



DURING the year 1213 the south of France had been the scene of a long and weary struggle between the Counts of the House of Toulouse and their Catholic subjects. Both parties had at length exchanged negotiations and treaties for open and determined hostilities. The circumstances which gave rise to the celebrated war with the Albigenses are doubtless known to all our readers; one of the most brilliant of its events was the victory of Muret, gained, according to the universal belief of the age, by the prayers offered by the Catholics in the Rosary to the Blessed Virgin.

A short pause of hostilities had taken place in consequence of the efforts of the Holy See and the council which met at Lavaur in the beginning of the year; but the decision of that council had been unfavourable to the Count of Toulouse, and King Peter of Arragon, who had espoused his cause, determined to open a fresh campaign against the Catholic confederates, without waiting for the arrival of the papal legate, who was on the road, commissioned by Innocent III. to arrange new articles of peace. Simon de Montfort was the well-known leader of the Catholics; but he was without an army. A small body of men were with him at the town of Fangeaux, when the news was suddenly brought him that the king of Arragon had passed the Pyrenees, and, together with the Counts of Toulouse, Foix, and Comminges, had advanced against the strong fortress of Muret, a town occupied by the Catholics, and situated on the Garonne, about three leagues above Toulouse. The army of the Albigense chiefs consisted

of 40,000 foot and 2,000 horse, according to the lowest reckoning, while some affirm it to have amounted altogether to 100,000 men. The forces of the Catholics consisted of no more than 800 cavalry, and about an equal number of infantry; and with this handful of followers De Montfort instantly resolved to set out for the relief of the town. He was joined at Bolbonne by the Bishops of Toulouse, Uzès, and several others. One of them endeavoured to dissuade him from what seemed a mere madness; but he remained unmovable in his determination. "The King of Arragon," he said, "has come to fight to please a woman (meaning the daughter of the Count of Toulouse, affianced to his eldest son); but God Himself will fight for us." He entered the church of Bolbonne, and prayed for some time before the altar. Ungirding his sword and laying it there, he offered it to God; then as he took it back again, he said, "O Lord, who hast chosen me, all unworthy as I am, to do battle in Thy name, I this day take my sword from Thine altar, that I may receive it from Thee, since for Thee I am about to fight." Then he proceeded to Saverdun, where it was determined in a council of war to rest that night, and press on for Muret on the following morning.

That night was spent by all in prayer and preparation for death; they confessed their sins devoutly, and, as tradition tells us, united altogether in the devotion of the Rosary, then but just beginning to be propagated. The next day they proceeded on their march, in spite of the continued rain, which rendered the roads almost impassable; crossed the Garonne without opposition, and on the evening of the 11th of September found themselves behind the towers of Muret. The soldiers, full of ardour, demanded to be led instantly to meet the enemy; but De Montfort, seeing the horses tired out by their long and fatiguing journey, judged it better to enter the town at once, and to defer any hostile movement *until the following day*. The bishops meanwhile had *despatched two religious to the camp of the King of*

Arragon to propose conditions of peace; but they had been repulsed with the sarcastic answer, "That it was scarcely worth while to hold a conference for the sake of the handful of scoundrels whom they had brought with them." They did not, however, abandon their hopes of bringing about some terms of conciliation, and sent word to the king that on the following morning they should appear barefoot before him, and implore him to reconsider his answer; but he would listen to no proposals short of the instant surrender of the town, together with the whole Catholic army, to his discretion. Early on the following day they attempted to carry their design into effect, and sent a religious before them to announce their approach. De Montfort caused the gates to be opened for him to pass through; but as he did so, a band of the heretics fell on him, and at the same time a very storm of stones and arrows was directed against the house where the bishops were assembled. De Montfort soon repulsed his adversaries, and returning to the ecclesiastics, "Do you not see," he said, "that your negotiations avail nothing? It is time now to fight,—to conquer or to perish." He gave orders to his followers to arm themselves, and entered the church, where the Bishop of Uzès offered the Holy Sacrifice. As he knelt before the altar, he again consecrated himself and his cause to God, saying these words: "My God, I offer you the sacrifice of my body and my soul." Then he went down into the town, where all his gallant little company were now gathered together, with a small reinforcement which he had received the evening before from his countess. His forces now amounted to nearly 1,000 men; for the infantry were left to garrison the place, and he intended to meet the enemy with his horsemen alone. They were all men of tried valour and determination, and strong in a noble faith; strong also in that purity of conscience and readiness to die for God, which gave them something of the glory of the martyr. De Montfort placed himself at their head with a cheerful and gallant air.

"Have you counted your people?" said one of his friends. "I count neither friends nor enemies," was his reply; "if God is for us, we are enough." As they stood waiting for the signal to move, the Bishops of Toulouse and Comminges approached to address to them some last words of exhortation, and to give them the solemn benediction. They carried a relic of the true cross, at the sight of which every man flung himself from his horse, and knelt in submissive reverence. One by one they went to the bishops' feet and kissed the holy relic, till the Bishop of Comminges, seeing the hour was growing late, and that Fulk of Toulouse was unable to address the troops from his deep agitation, took the crucifix from his hands, and going to a little eminence with it, harangued the army in a few encouraging words, and blessed them as they knelt. Then the ecclesiastics turned back into the church to pray, and the thousand devoted warriors rode out of the city-gate.

The besiegers had left their position to receive them, and were too confident of success to make any arrangement for securing it. They were already raising cries of mockery and insulting triumph over their handful of antagonists, when they were, as it were, stunned by the shock of a charge so terrible and impetuous that it bore all before it. Ere they knew what had happened, their first division was overthrown. De Montfort and his men-at-arms knew too well the disparity of numbers to trust to long manœuvring; their only hope was in a *coup-de-main*, and in the surprise which might result from the very audacity of the attack. As soon therefore as they were free from the gates, they ranged themselves in order of battle, and galloped against the ranks of the enemy. Dashing against them with irresistible fury, they broke through every obstacle; and before the advanced guard of the army had recovered from their disorder, riding through them with the impetuosity of a *whirlwind*, they fell on the Catalans, who were posted *behind*, under the command of the Count de Foix. The

whole affair took but a few minutes; for the Catholic warriors had never drawn bridle, or slackened their speed. They literally rode their opponents down by sheer force. Glancing around him, and seeing the advantage which this first success had given him, De Montfort resolved to pursue it ere his enemies had recovered their presence of mind. Leading his followers on in the same gallant and extraordinary style, he dashed forward to the very centre of the hostile army, where the royal standard of Arragon indicated the presence of the king. The Spaniards received him with a valour as determined as his own; and the terrible nature of the struggle for a few minutes is thus described by the younger Count of Toulouse, who was a spectator of the conflict. "The noise of that shock," he says, "was so violent, that it was like the sound of a multitude of woodcutters when they are hewing down the forest-trees with their axes." The fight was hand to hand, and the swords of the combatants were rattling on the helmets of their adversaries; but the struggle, fierce as it was, was very short. Something of supernatural power seemed to be given to the strokes of the Crusaders, and the Arragonese troops gave way. The voice of their chief might have rallied them, but he lay dead on the field; after a brave resistance he had been struck from his horse, and fell, together with the flower of his army and of his court, who had gathered round him for his defence. His death was the signal for a general flight, a panic seemed to spread through every rank; for it was felt that some more than human agency was fighting against them. As the citizens of Muret looked from their walls, they could see the whole plain without covered with fugitives. Some threw themselves into the Garonne, others fell like sheep before the knife of the butcher, and scarcely offered resistance to the swords of their opponents; whilst the flying troops were still pursued, until, weary of slaughter, the Crusaders turned their bridles, and rode back over the battle-field to consider the best means of securing their

victory. But a second battle remained to be fought; for whilst the cavalry of the two armies were engaged, the infantry of the heretic forces had made a furious assault on the town, which they hoped to carry whilst De Montfort was occupied in the pursuit. De Montfort turned against them another of those terrific charges, that swept them before his horse's feet, as stones before a mountain torrent; and the victory was gained: nearly 20,000 of the heretics fell in these two engagements. Of the Catholics we are assured, upon evidence we cannot doubt, that eight men only were missing when the day's work was over.

As De Montfort rode over the field of battle, his horse's feet stopped by the body of the King of Arragon. He drew his bridle; and descending from the saddle, he bent over his fallen foe with tears of generous compassion. It was a picture of the ages of chivalry,—that mixture of the fiercest valour and the tenderest emotions of pity. He kissed the bleeding wounds, and gave orders for his honourable burial; then, with the instinct of true Christian chivalry, he returned to Muret barefoot, and went first to the church to give thanks to God for the victory he had gained. His horse and arms were sold, and the money given to the poor.

The particulars of this battle are given in a letter drawn up by the bishops and others, who were present in Muret, and who, after stating the extraordinary circumstances of the whole affair, and the relative numbers lost on both sides, add, "We but attest that which we have seen and heard; and certify that all which we have related is true." Indeed, it was felt by all sides, that the success of the Catholics must be attributed to greater influence than mere valour; and the universal voice of the faithful declared that they owed it to the special patronage and favour of Mary, whom they had invoked in her holy Rosary. De Montfort himself was accustomed to speak of it in this way; and in the little *chapel of the Rosary*, erected in the same year within *the church of Muret*, the circumstances of the battle, and

the popular belief regarding it, are at once commemorated by the figures represented in the picture which hangs above the altar. In the middle is the Blessed Virgin, on one side the great St. Dominic, receiving the Rosary from her hand, whilst he grasps in his own a crucifix pierced with three arrows. On the other side are kneeling Fulk of Toulouse and the Count De Montfort. The same group recur in many paintings of the period, as if to keep alive the association of the victory with the devotion of the Rosary and the prayers of St. Dominic. And if we consider the extraordinary character of the battle, and the truly devoted and Christian spirit of those who won it, we shall not hesitate to rank Muret among one of the most distinguished of those heroic conflicts which have been fought for the faith, and gained under the invocation of "Our Lady of Victories."



III.

THE DOMINICANS IN GHENT.

(1577.)



HE celebrated political act known under the name of *The Peace of Religion*, had in 1577 permitted the people of Ghent the free exercise of Catholic worship. In the mean time, Peter Dathenus, the most fiery and violent of the Calvinistic ministers of that period, in concert with Ryhone and Jean Hembyze, who at this time held jointly the reins of power in the capital of Flanders, sought in every possible way to prevent the carrying out of this treaty. The clergy had, it is true, resumed the solemn ceremonies of the ancient worship; the monks had returned to their convents; but a constant feeling of uneasiness and dread continued still to oppress their hearts. Incessantly pursued, watched, and threatened by magistrates whose greatest desire was to witness the triumph of the new doctrines; exposed every day to the caprices of an arbitrary government; subjected to the excesses of an undisciplined and barbarous soldiery,—they felt that the most futile pretexts would be seized upon, in order to deprive them on the first opportunity of the exercise of their time-honoured religion. But these priests,—these holy men who had been consecrated to the altar from their youth, and whose days had been passed in religious exercises, were men of singularly bold and determined hearts. As is always the case at the epoch of religious wars, when faith is watered and nourished by persecution, and supplies a supernatural courage, it happened that the more the violence of the enemy was shown in persecuting the servants of God,—disturbing

and harassing them even in the solitude of their holy asylums,—so much the more were they endued with perseverance and energy in defending the holy worship to which they were dedicated. It is a noble thing to witness a profound and lively belief in the verities of the faith struggling against the intolerant fanaticism of impiety. The sight of such firm conviction and strength of soul strikes the beholder with admiration, and inspires even the most indifferent with a feeling of respect for the dignity of the oppressed.

Don John of Austria, the moderate representative of Philip II., wished to restore the Flemish provinces to a better state; and his good intentions were a means of restraining the Prince of Orange, who sought to triumph over the King of Spain, by availing himself of the discontent excited by the cruelties of the Duke of Alva. The Prince would have liked a governor better who would have trod in the steps of the Spanish pro-consul: but circumstances had changed; time had proved that mildness and lenity were more effectual for good than persecution and the scaffold. The conduct of Don John induced the wisest men to rally round him; and this greatly disconcerted the plans of the Calvinistic leaders.

The *Peace of Religion* was unfavourable to their views; they considered that to crush for ever the Spanish dominion there was one infallible means, namely, the destruction of all that pertained to the Catholic worship. A public act, it is true, hindered them from putting their odious designs avowedly into execution; but there remained many secret means of oppression, which, without ostensibly violating this famous “peace,” would nevertheless bring about the same result.

The year 1578 was especially remarkable for this kind of persecution, and for the recurrence of the horrible machinations devised by the Iconoclasts of 1566.

The Convent of the Dominicans was one of the monastic institutions of the town of Ghent which excited, more than others, the malevolence of the Calvinists.

The reputation for sanctity and learning of these religious, their extensive possessions, their magnificent library, supplied sufficient reasons in the eyes of the Calvinists for the destruction of their establishment. Scandalous vices, political intrigues, crimes of every kind and degree, were charged upon the members of this unfortunate monastery. Meanwhile these holy religious lived on quietly, and in the peace of the Lord, occupying themselves in good works, praying and praising God, relieving the destitute, and employing their leisure hours in literary labours and in the study of the sciences.

It was on the Feast of Pentecost, 1578. High Mass was ended; and the brothers were still prostrate in the choir, when a dreadful tumult was heard at the doors of the church,—a confused noise of clamorous voices, mingled with oaths and the clashing of arms. Scarcely had the monks turned with anxious looks towards the door of the church, than they saw a troop of half-drunken soldiers enter, having at their head the famous leaguer De la Noue.

"Come, fellows," cried he, advancing towards the choir; "leave your prayers, and show us this instant your brother-prior, who is summoned to appear before M. de Ryhone, that he may answer for the plots and base practices towards the Calvinists of this town of which he is accused."

"What do you want with me?" asked the venerable Brother de Borggrave, advancing towards the soldiers. "I am the prior."

"It is you, is it? then follow me." And turning to his companions-in-arms, the ruffian said: "I have got possession of this madman prior; do you take these other fools." And while the captain led away the prior, the soldiers shut up the remaining fifty-two Dominicans in the refectory.

Brother Borggrave appeared before Ryhone.

"*Accursed hypocrite,*" cried the furious tribune as he appeared before him, "I command you to confess

at once the crime of which you stand accused. We ordered fifty soldiers to be lodged in your house; two of them have suddenly died, and their companions assure me that you attempted to poison them all, but that the poison took effect only upon these two unfortunate men."

"Monsieur de Ryhone," answered the prior, calmly, "I can only say in one word that this infamous accusation is false. As for myself, I am in your hands; do with me what you will."

"Ah! you wish to hoodwink me by an appearance of boldness; consider well what you say, for by my faith it will be the worse for you!"

"I have never spoken against the truth, sir; and, God is my witness, I have no fear of unjust punishment."

"We shall see," cried Ryhone, furious at witnessing the courage displayed in the bearing of the holy man.

In an hour after this interview, the Prior de Borggrave was sent back to the Dominican convent; but pale and trembling, and with his limbs dislocated. They had put him to the torture; but happily the venerable religious, sustained by conscious innocence, had preserved an unshaken firmness; and nothing could induce him to confess a crime which he had not committed.

Scarcely had a few hours passed, when a commotion was heard in the church of the convent, apparently close to the refectory, some of the windows of which received a borrowed light from the nave of the church.

"My God! what has happened?" cried the affrighted monks; and at the same time, climbing up on the tables and chairs, they looked down into the church. The spectacle which presented itself to their eyes was a fearful one: a crowd of furious men were occupied in the destruction of all that hitherto had been honoured and revered. The altar was destroyed, the tabernacle broken, the pictures defaced; the vile soldiery were decking themselves out with the dalmatics and chasubles, and drinking wine from the sacred chalices; trampling under foot the Crucifix and the images of the Blessed Virgin, tearing in pieces the albs and surplices, and

making the vault of the church resound with blasphemous imprecations. It was enough to make the poor monks weep tears of blood. They remained with their pale countenances fastened, as it were, to the windows of the church; and but for their pious resignation, would have been ready to dash their heads against the bars which held them captive. Alas, they were prisoners, they were powerless; they could only invoke the mercy of God in this moment of fury and desolation.

The library of the convent, which adjoined the church, was soon likewise entered; and all the literary treasures which sixty years of toil, research, and expense had amassed, were hurled from the windows, scattered to the winds, or precipitated into the river Lys, which flowed behind the convent.

The work of destruction was ended; and the poor Dominicans believed that it only remained for them to die. They fell on their knees in the middle of the refectory, and piously chanted that expressive psalm: *Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me!* Their chants had long ceased, night had arrived, and no other noise was heard in the convent but the dull and monotonous step of the two sentinels, who, with shouldered muskets, walked up and down before the bolted door of the refectory.

Meanwhile the excesses committed against the Dominican convents, in contempt of the "act of peace," had had the effect of exciting the indignation of the Catholics and of all men of moderate views; and for several days there had been a rumour of a projected outrage against the monks, the leaders alleging as a pretext for their violent proceedings, the pretended attempts of the Dominicans to poison the soldiers. Ryhone therefore feared every instant that an insurrection would take place in the town, and that the people would come to the succour of the religious so shamefully persecuted.

When the leader of the band of rioters had reported

to him the result of their expedition, he ordered him **not** to lose sight of the Dominicans, but to **force** them, in some way or other, to quit their monastery; hoping, no doubt, that their example would be followed by others, and that the monastic orders, terrified by these attempts, would one after another abandon their convents and retreat from the town. Meanwhile the Dominicans, shut up in total darkness, waited with anxiety for the decision of their fate.

It was just midnight when a fresh noise was heard; the door of the refectory was opened, and sixty men of ominous aspect, each carrying a lighted taper, entered the vast hall. With an ironical smile on their lips, they ordered the monks to take their places at the table: the latter obeyed; for all resistance was hopeless. They placed a taper before each religious, took their muskets in their hands, and aimed at the monks; waiting, as they said, only for a signal to launch them into eternity. Time, however, passed on, and no one appeared to put an end to this frightful suspense. Horrible imprecations issued from the mouths of the soldiers: they cursed the tardiness of their leader, and cried that they were going to fire without waiting for the order of their captain, when the door was opened a second time, and a new personage appeared. This time it was a man tall and thin, but powerfully made; he wore red-striped knee-breeches, his shirt-sleeves turned up above the elbow, and a scarlet hat without a feather on his head. He carried an enormous two-edged sabre, and had all the appearance of an executioner. "Back!" cried he as he entered, and cast a terrific glance around him; "back, soldiers, withdraw your muskets: it is I who am charged by M. de Ryhonne with executing justice upon this monastery; only see that none make resistance. The noise of your fire-arms might rouse those who take the part of these rascally friars; I am ordered to adopt a more quiet method, and to cut off their heads with this sword. *On your knees, accursed monks; your hour is come!*"

"I am the Prior of the Dominicans; to me belong the first honours of martyrdom. But I ask one moment longer."

"Well, one moment; but make quick work of it."

"Brothers and friends," exclaimed the venerable prior, addressing himself to his companions, "Jesus Christ has died for our sins. Poor sinners as we are, let us prove that we are not unworthy of the sacrifice He has made for us of His life. Let us die with firmness and courage; let us praise the Lord for having reserved to us the martyrs' palm."

"Come, come, when will you have finished?" broke in the executioner with impatience. "I have no time to lose; remove your cowl, and kneel down before me."

"Adieu, my brothers; pardon me all the faults I have committed while I was your prior." And kneeling down on the bare flags of the refectory, Father Borggrave bowed his head, waiting for the fatal blow. The monks pressing his hand, also asked pardon for all they had done; and invoking heaven, they threw themselves on their knees and together chanted the *De profundis*. It was truly an awe-inspiring yet touching sight! this noble resignation of fifty men preparing to die, and thus calmly joining in the Church's prayers for the departed, presented a scene so grand and majestic, that it recalled to mind the first martyrs of the Christian faith.

The executioner himself appeared moved; for though he said bluffly to the monks, "Now, get ready; for I can't be kept waiting," there was something of irresolution in his voice, which betrayed an involuntary emotion.

The door of the refectory opened once more, and a man of savage appearance rushed into the hall. "Hold! stay!" cried he, addressing himself to the executioner. Then turning towards the monks, "I offer you one chance for your lives: quit the convent immediately, and leave the town."

"*M. de Ryhone*," replied the Prior, recognising the voice of the tribune of Ghent, "if our death can

be of service to the Catholic religion, we are ready to suffer. But if we are allowed to live and to follow freely the religion of our fathers, we will accept your offer,—we will depart.”

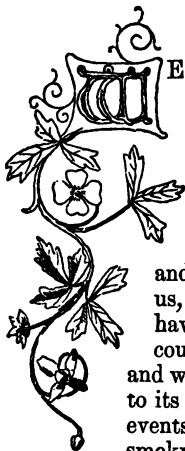
Some hours after, the Dominican convent of Ghent was deserted; the good religious had abandoned the home to which they were not to return until six years later.

The terrible comedy we have described was played off for no other end than to force the monks to quit the capital of Flanders, where a few months later the cold and intolerant fanaticism of the Calvinists reigned supreme.



IV.

THE MARTYRS OF STONE.



E are about, for a few moments, to draw the reader's attention away from the foreign lands which have hitherto formed the scenery of our stories, to place him amid a more familiar landscape; such as England once presented, when her beauty was undefaced by the havoc of modern civilisation, and of which traces are still left among us, to show what that beauty must once have been. We shall place him in a country where trade is now the busiest, and where commerce has even given a name to its geography; but in the time when the events of which we speak took place, the smoky country of the Potteries was a wide and noble forest, and formed part of the dominions of the Saxon kings of Mercia.

What the English forest-lands were, which covered the greater portion of the island in the earlier period of its history, we may judge in some degree by the remains still left of some of them. Any one who is familiar with the royal chases of Hampshire or Herefordshire knows what beauty of greenwood scenery is to be found in their recesses; what a glorious light struggles through the tracery of the tangled branches, and chequers the broad lawns that lie under their shadow with a broken light of golden green, that has a quivering richness in it like the rays from a cathedral window. They know the sweet wood-music that stirs among the boughs, and can learn to distinguish all its *changes and flexions*, from the low dirge that sighs *through the melancholy pine* to the quick glad rustle

of the oak-leaves as they move and dance joyfully to the morning breeze. All this they know, and many another of the secrets of the sciences which Nature teaches to the eye and ear of her votaries; but if they would complete the picture of an English forest as it stood 1200 years ago, they must add some features which do not exist now-a-days. For, first, there was danger; not the danger of a snake or an angry deer, but the danger of a time when the land was still half-barbarous, and the Christian faith militant against heathenism. And so in the hidden nooks of these forests you might chance to come on the rude cell of a hermit, who had fled into the wilderness that he might worship God in peace; and this was the second feature which distinguished an English forest of those days: you could scarce go far, in Saxon times, without falling on traces of that faith which, though it had not as yet made entire conquest of the country, had nevertheless covered it with monasteries and churches, and honoured its barbarous nomenclature with a glorious calendar of saints. It was in one of these forests, that extended in the seventh century over the wide valley watered by the Trent, that a royal hunting-train might be seen winding through the woody glades, with its usual equipment of hounds and horsemen. Doubtless it would seem a strange sight to our modern sportsman; for the huntsmen were armed with pike and javelin, and the dogs were of a breed that Leicestershire has never seen,—the strong old British hounds, that were even in Strabo's days exported to foreign countries, being reckoned excellent "both for the hunt and war." Indeed a hunt in those days was not very dissimilar to war, in the preparation that attended it and the disasters which often befell men in its pursuit; for English woods had robbers as well as deer, and other denizens beside. "Very near to the north," says a writer, describing London in the days of Henry II., "there lieth a large forest, in which are woody groves of wild beasts; in the coverts whereof do lurk bucks and does, wild-boars

and bulls;" to which catalogue, at the time of which we write, there might be added wolves, and even bears. The hunting-train of the Mercian prince, therefore, which was threading the windings of the Trentham Forest, had a gallant, and something of a warlike appearance. The men who composed it were not those who would be likely to fear much from wolf or boar; they were rude and ferocious in their bearing, and of almost gigantic stature. Some were on foot, having long staves to beat the game from the bushes where it might be lurking; but the greater number were mounted, and rode with a bold and fearless air.

A little ahead of the company, there might, however, be seen one whose aspect was very different from those of the men by whom he was surrounded. To judge by his face, he seemed scarcely more than eighteen; and his slight figure and delicate features presented a singular contrast to the fierce and herculean forms of his companions. It was Wulfhad, the eldest son of the Mercian king Wulfhere, for whose pleasure this hunting expedition had that morning set out from the royal palace in the neighbourhood. Even a passing observer would probably have declared that the owner of that countenance could scarcely have been a pagan. There was a mildness in his soft blue eye, and a gentleness in his whole demeanour, that could never have been found in one addicted to the bloody superstition of the Saxon heathens; and yet, were the critic one well skilled in such a study, he might equally have hesitated in pronouncing him a Christian. Let it not be thought fanciful if we say that no sentiment ever stamped its mark on the human countenance with a surer and clearer line than does the gift of faith. Without it there may be refinement, or even devotion; but there is always the look of unsatisfied restlessness, and the sadness of an unanswered question; and this was the feeling that breathed over every feature of the pale and beautiful *countenance of the Mercian prince.*

Nor will this be difficult to explain, when we under-

stand the position of young Wulfhad. His father was a Christian by name only, having professed the faith in order to receive the hand of Erminilda, the daughter of King Ercombest of Kent, in whom centered the blood, not only of all the Saxon kings, but yet more of their most glorious saints. Her ancestry might be reckoned on the calendar; her mother, her sisters, and her aunts were saints, and in God's providence, saints also were destined to be her children. On her marriage with the king he had received baptism, and pledged himself to destroy idolatry throughout his kingdom; a promise, however, he found it inconvenient to fulfil, as the people were still much attached to their pagan superstitions. Erminilda, therefore, though permitted in the exercise of her own religion, was compelled to do so under restrictions; nor had she, as yet, ventured to secure the baptism of any of her children, except her only daughter Wereburga. Yet her sons felt in her gentle and beautiful character the influence of a religion which as yet they did not know. They were trained in the practice of Christian manners before they knew the Christian faith; and Wulfhad had learnt a disgust for the impiety of paganism, whilst his soul was filled with an insatiable longing to find its resting-place in some purer creed. His mind was preyed upon by doubt, or rather by its own emptiness of belief; and it was to lull its disquietude by the diversion of animal exercise, rather than for any real pleasure he took in the amusement, that he often led his followers to the forest, and spent the day in the fierce excitement of the chase. Near to him, and seemingly holding the first station among his attendants, rode one whose appearance was as forbidding and suspicious as that of the young prince was prepossessing; it was Werebode, the favourite knight of King Wulfhere, and himself a ferocious pagan.

It was not long before a deer was started from the thicket, and the chase began. The dew lay fresh upon the grass, for it was still early morning, and the scent was good; so Wulfhad was roused for a while from

the pensiveness which seemed to have absorbed him, and followed with unusual spirit upon the track of the hounds. Whether it were that the recklessness of a mind that was ill at ease added boldness to his riding, or indeed that some higher influence was directing the course of that morning's hunt, he soon left his followers far behind him; nay, the very dogs lagged off one by one, and he was left alone with his own faithful hound, who, like himself, kept on untiringly on the traces of the unfortunate doe. He had ridden thus for some hours without being conscious that he had outstripped his companions, until he suddenly observed that no one was near him, and that he had been led into a part of the forest he had never seen before. The dog too seemed at fault, as if he had lost the scent; and Wulf-had began to think his ride would be without purpose, and that he would do best to find the way back to the remainder of his party. This, however, was not so easy; the place was strange to him, and he had not observed the path by which he came. As he looked about him, it seemed even as if it were seldom that any human step could have penetrated into the recess where he now found himself; for the forest was wild and tangled, and bore no trace of human cultivation or abode. He wound his horn; but the only answer to the sound was the echo cast back by the rocks that rose in the distance; and tying his horse to a tree, he resolved to dismount, and search if he could find out some road which should conduct him to a more frequented part. He was not long before he heard the pleasant sound of running water; and knowing that did he but follow the windings of the stream it could scarcely fail to lead him safely, he took his horse by the bridle, and proceeded to make his way towards the quarter whence the sound proceeded. He had not gone far before the thick heavy foliage of the trees *seemed to open* and admit a flood of light; the smooth *grass of a green and beautiful forest lawn stretched beneath his feet*, the stream whose ripple he had heard

was to be seen flowing gently over its rocky bed, and the whole scene was one of singular and surpassing beauty. But what was Wulfhad's surprise to see in this lonely and unfrequented spot the form of something like a human habitation? It was but a rude kind of dwelling, scooped, as it seemed, out of the rock, and overshadowed by the trees that hung above its entrance. Wulfhad approached with some curiosity to discover the inhabitant of so singular an abode; but his surprise was not lessened by the spectacle that met his eye when he stood in the open doorway, and was enabled to look into the cavern. Its furniture consisted of a table and seat, hewn, like the dwelling itself, out of the rock; but on one side the appearance of a rough altar, above which was carved the figure of the crucifix, betrayed the character of its inmate; and Wulfhad knew that he had fallen on the retreat of one of the persecuted solitaries of his mother's faith. Kneeling in prayer before that altar was a man of venerable aspect, whose meditation had not been disturbed by the prince's quiet step upon the grass; nor was it till his shadow filled the doorway, and intercepted the narrow ray of light, that the hermit was aware of the presence of a stranger, and rose to his feet to receive him.

"You are an early visitor, my son," he said, "nor know I that we have ever met before; was it chance that brought you to my solitude, or are you indeed of the true and suffering faith, and so have come to seek for ghostly counsel at my hands?"

"In truth, good father," replied the young man, "it was the track of a wandering deer that guided me hither; and I am not what you deem, nor know I aught of the faith you speak of, save that it suffers, and therein," he added with a sad smile, "has a claim upon my love."

"That is no pagan thought, my son," said the hermit, bending on him a look of tender interest. "*To whom am I speaking, if the question troubles you not to answer?*"

"To Wulfhad, the son of Wulfhere," replied the prince; "and you say rightly, for I am no pagan. I have an empty faith, and an empty heart; but to those bloody idols at least will I never bow my knee."

"Now may the dear Lord who died on yonder rood be blessed and glorified," exclaimed the hermit; "surely has it been His love and thine own good angel that has brought thee hither, that thou shouldst receive the words of life, yea, though from the unworthy lips of the sinner Chad;" and with these words, St. Chad, for it was even he, made the young man sit down beside him, and drew from his not unwilling lips the secrets of his heart. He found the ground ready prepared, and wanting only the hand of the sower to cast in the seed of faith. The sublime truths of revelation found ready entrance into a soul already thirsting to receive them; and when, late in the evening, Wulfhad prepared to return to the palace, it was with the promise to find his way again to the hermit's cell, that he might by further instruction be fitted to receive the holy rite of baptism.

His long absence was easily explained when he reached the palace by the fact of his having outridden his companions and lost his way; but when day after day the same adventure was recurring, the attention of the courtiers began to be excited. The young prince's taste for hunting seemed strangely to increase; yet there was always some disaster, which served as the excuse for his separating from his attendants and coming home alone and at a later hour. One time it was the cast shoe of his horse, or the lameness of his favourite hound, or it might be the starting of some beast of prey whom he had resolved to follow; though, as it seemed, always with bad success, for Wulfhad brought no game to show as the spoils of his day's sport.

We have already mentioned a certain pagan knight who enjoyed the confidence of King Wulfhere, and who *indeed in some sort* held the place of governor to his *sons*. *Werebode* bore no good-will to the young prince; *for he attributed to his dislike and influence his own*

rejection as a suitor by the princess Wereburga; although, indeed, the true cause of his disappointment was the secret consecration of the Christian virgin to the service of God. Naturally of a suspicious temper, and roused to vigilance by circumstances that seemed to enfold some mystery, he resolved on setting a watch on the prince's footsteps, that he might if possible discover the cause of his frequent wandering in the forest. Meanwhile Wulfhad, all unconscious of the snare that was being laid for him, had already received baptism at the hands of Chad. Nor was this all: the young catechumen had in his turn become an apostle; and communicating to his younger brother Rufin the instructions of the hermit, had brought him likewise to the same regenerating waters, and had stood godfather to him on a morning which, in the joy of his heart, he felt to be the happiest of his life; for both of them had knelt before the altar, as St. Chad celebrated the Holy Sacrifice before their eyes, and Wulfhad had served at those mysteries wherein he had learned to know the presence of his incarnate God; and when the Mass was over, and St. Chad had dismissed them with his blessing, it was with the promise that on the following Sunday they should return together, and receive from his hands for the first time the bread of life. They rode home side by side, both filled with a happiness that was some time ere it vented itself in words. Rufin was several years younger than his brother, a mere boy; differing too in bodily temperament and disposition; for his eye danced with a merry vivacity, and in the glorious light-heartedness of his years he frolicked on his pony beside his graver brother, and whistled to the dogs, and seemed to fill the glades of the dark and solemn forest with something of sunshine as he passed. They had ridden in silence for some time, and Wulfhad was the first to speak.

"Rufin," he said, "it seems to me that all things have a different look to-day from what they ever bore before, or rather, I should say the old look has come

back upon them that they used to wear when you and I were children."

"Dear brother," answered Rufin, "I know not what you mean, save, indeed, that your own face hath a different look; as for the forest, it was ever a glorious place to ride in."

"Aye," answered his brother, "but not for many a year has it been a glorious place to me. Not since I was a child, Rufin, has the sun looked bright, or the woods gay and gladsome till to-day. I know not how it was, but I have been an old man all my life; our mother's sadness, and those bloody pagan rites which I ever shrank from, weighed upon my heart; and my soul so craved for worship and for love, and that they never found till now. Now does it seem to me as if the sickly shadows had all flown away, and the darkness had gone out of the sunshine; and never surely did the birds sing with such a merry and abundant joy as they do this morning."

"Dear Wulfhad," returned his brother, "I am a Christian, and I thank God for it: it is the faith of our blessed mother; and with His grace, before you and I are dead it shall be the faith of Mercia too. Nevertheless, you know well that I was never such a dreamer as you are; and to my ear the birds you speak of have ever been sweeter songsters than any of my father's minstrels."

"Sweeter," said Wulfhad; "but to my heart they have been so pitiful and sad—the very branches of the trees have wailed above my head with a melancholy tone, and the more of beauty I found, even so much the more had I a longing that was never satisfied: and now it is satisfied, and my heart is at rest." And as he spoke, you might see that the pensive beauty of his eye was lit by the radiance of an unutterable peace.

"Brother," resumed Rufin, as they had ridden on *for some time in silence*, "do you know what I have *been thinking?* Even that the black cowl of our good *hermit would suit your head far better than a steel head-*

piece. How think you those fine fancies of yours will suit the Mercian folk, who have been used to be governed at the sword's point by our father?"

"You shall rule them, my Rufin," returned his brother; "that madcap spirit of yours will some day play with the sword and headpiece better than I should do. You shall be king, and I your subject; and some where in your broad lands of Mercia you shall find a nook for the hermit Wulfhad."

"Nay, not so," answered the boy; "for you are now my godfather, and we will go together. I would not be a hermit though," he added; "better be God's soldier, if you care not for knightly sword, and preach the faith, and plant the cross, and die a saint or a martyr." And he looked up in his brother's face, as if to see the effect his half-spoken words had produced.

Wulfhad had checked his horse, and was gazing before him at the sun, now fast sinking over the hills. He scarcely seemed to hear what was said; for his eye was fixed on the masses of golden clouds slowly rolling to the west, as though he sought to find among their depths a gate or a path to heaven. His bridle hung on his horse's neck, and his hands were clasped, as Rufin thought in prayer; and it seemed to him that the light, as it streamed on his upturned face, played with a strange and flickering ray over its features, and formed itself into a coronet of glory about his brow. There was another eye beside his own resting on them at that moment, nor had it stirred from watching them throughout the entire day. Werebode had followed on their track; and concealing himself behind the overhanging bushes, had been witness to the baptism of Rufin, and had carefully noted the day appointed for their return to the hermitage. The opportunity for his long-coveted revenge seemed now at hand; nor did he fail to improve it. As soon, therefore, as the two princes had returned to the palace, Werebode hastened to the pre-

sence of the king, and communicated the result of his day's inquiry. He knew, however, that the fact of their embracing the Christian faith, though it would scarcely fail of being highly displeasing to Wulfhere, would not of itself bring him to the point he desired; therefore he made an artful use of the presence of St. Chad to persuade the king that the whole was a treacherous plot against his crown, concerted in league with the Northumbrian monarch, who was the hereditary foe of the house of Mercia, and of whom St. Chad was indeed a subject.

The skilful insinuation and eloquence of Werebode were but too successfully planned: Wulfhere agreed to accompany him on the appointed day, that he might receive the proof of his son's treachery with his own eyes. The day arrived, a glorious July morning; the earth bathed in its summer flood of beauty, which made the green lawn before the hermitage, and the waving woods, and the clear crystal stream seem fit scenery for the solemn act which was to set the seal to the happiness of the two brothers, and unite them with the link of loving communion to their God.

Wulfhere and Werebode were in the hiding-place already known to the latter; and the king, as he stood there, could see all that passed. Scarcely, indeed, did he understand it; for he had never assisted at the Christian mysteries, far less had he been a partaker in them himself; yet, though as he stood by, the unconscious witness of his children's first communion, he comprehended but little of the ceremony, he saw enough to satisfy him of the truth of one part at least of Werebode's tale. They were Christians; and that in itself was an offence against his authority and positive command. Wherefore, breaking from his covert, he entered the hermitage with a hasty step, and laid a rough and angry hand upon Wulfhad's shoulder. "What means *this foolery?*" he said; "I thought thou hadst better *known thy subject's duty.* Up; and by the gods of

Hengist, if thou dost not speedily undo this morning's work, thy head shall pay the forfeit, wert thou twenty times my son!"

Wulfhad was still kneeling when his father spoke. Nor did there pass the shadow of a change over his countenance as he heard the king's passionate words: his Lord was with him, and within him, and even for a moment after his father had ceased to speak he remained in silence; for he felt as though it were something like profanation to move those happy consecrated lips in aught save thanksgiving to God. "Speak, boy," said the king again, whose fierce nature was irritated by his son's continued silence; "speak, I say, and tell me that thou or I am dreaming; there must be but one faith in Mercia."

Then Wulfhad rose; and slowly and reverently signing himself with the cross, he answered in a firm and resolute tone, "I am a Christian."

"A rebel rather," exclaimed the king, as he struck him furiously in the face; but his arm was held back by a boyish grasp, and Rufin threw himself between them.

"He is no rebel, father," said the child; "he has the most loyal heart in Mercia. I will die ere any of the pagan churls at court shall touch his head, or dare to call him traitor."

"Then die," answered the enraged monarch. "It is the false blood of Kent that speaks, and not the race of Penda;" and ere the words were finished, his sword was buried deep in the heart of Rufin. Wulfhad caught him as he fell, and leant to hear a faltering accent that fell from his lips.

"*I believe,*" he whispered; and the words were the last he uttered. With his dying thoughts the young catechumen was reciting the symbol of his faith; and then his head fell heavily on his brother's shoulder, and the short death-struggle was over.

"Is not one life enough?" exclaimed the hermit, as Wulfhere seemed about to turn his fury upon his

eldest son. But Werebode hastened to interrupt his words.

"The king needs not the counsel of Northumbria," he said; "if Wulfhad be indeed no traitor, let him offer proof of his allegiance. See here," he continued, seizing the crucifix from the altar, "let him but set his foot thus on the impious symbol, and we will believe his words;" and as he spoke he cast the sacred image to the ground, and trampled it in the dust. Wulfhad threw himself on his knees, and rescuing the crucifix from the profanation to which it was exposed, he pressed it to his heart. That action was the signal for his death; for the sword that was still wet with Rufin's blood descended heavily on his bowed head, half-severing it from his body; and clasping the sign of his redemption close to his breast, Wulfhad fell at the foot of the altar and expired.

The passion of Wulfhere seemed to grow calm when he saw his two sons lying dead before him; even Werebode himself stood pale and motionless, and there was a pause of terrible silence. Chad stooped over the martyrs' bodies, and raising them from the ground, he wiped the blood from their pale faces and laid them side by side on the altar-step; then he turned to the unhappy father, over whom, now that the moment of madness had passed away, there was fast stealing the anguish of remorse. "Thou hast given unto God two martyrs," he said; "and their blood is crying unto heaven, not for vengeance, but for grace. The hour is not far hence when thou wouldst barter the crown of Mercia but to find a place of penance; and when that hour is come, thou shalt return hither to seek it on thy children's grave. Go hence now, with the blood upon thy soul; but know that the memory of this deed shall never depart from off the land."

How Wulfhere and Werebode made their way back to the palace may be better imagined than described. *A black despair* seemed to have seized on the king's heart; and bitterly did he reproach his companion for

the crime to which his words had urged him. And when Erminilda came out to meet him, and, terrified by his gloomy aspect, strove to speak sweetly and cheerfully, and asked him in her gentle voice what troubled him that morning, and why he had been so long away, she heard from his own lips the tale of horror, which told her at once of her husband's crime and the death of both her sons.

But Erminilda was something more even than a Christian mother, she was a Christian saint; she put away from her the selfish grief for those whose fate, while the world called it cruel, was so glorious in the sight of God, and kept all her strength and tenderness for the comforting of her husband's soul. During the weeks of delirium and fever that followed on that fatal day, she never left his side; she brought back to him the better thoughts and associations which had been shrouded by long years of apostasy and violence. And when Wulfhere rose from his sick-bed penitent, yet scarcely venturing to hope, she brought St. Chad to his presence, and implored him to seal his conversion by the confession of his sins.

The future history of Wulfhere shows the success that crowned her efforts; for the remainder of his life was spent in penance for his crime. The idols were banished from the kingdom, and the blood of the two martyrs became as it were the seed of the Church; for from that hour the faith took root in Mercia: and a few years after, at the entreaty of the king, Chad himself became its bishop, and completed the conversion of the country. A cairn of stones, erected over the burial-place of the two princes, gave its name to a town which afterwards gathered round the spot; and the priory raised to their honour in that place, as well as the stately abbey of Peterborough, both the work of Wulfhere, remained to future ages the monuments of his crime and his repentance.

In the western cloister of the latter church might be seen painted on the windows the legend of the Mar-

tyrs of Stone, with the following metrical version of their history, and that of the abbey, part of which we subjoin, as it stands in the pages of Dugdale:—

By Queen Ermenild had King Wulfhære
These twae sons that ye see here.

Wulfhære went forth, as he was wont,
In the forest, the hart to hunt.

Fro all his men Wulfhære is gon,
And suyeth himself the hart alone.

The hart brought Wulfhære unto a well
That was beside S. Chad his cell.

Wulfhære asked of S. Chad,
Where is the hart that me hath lad.

Wulfhære prayeth Chad that ghostly leach
The faith of Christ him for to teach.

S. Chad teacheth Wulfhære the fayth,
And words of baptisme over him sayth.

S. Chad devoutly to messe him dight,
And shrived Wulfhære Christ his knight.

Wulfhære stayed with S. Chad that'day,
And bad him for his brother Rufine pray.

Wulfhære told his brother Rufine,
How he was christned by Chad's doctrine.

Rufine said to Wulfhære again
Christned also would I bee fayne.

Wulfhære Rufine to S. Chad brought,
And Chad with love of Christ him taught

Rufine is christened of S. Chad, I wis,
And Wulfhære, his brother, his fader is.

Werebode, steward to king Wulfhære,
Told his sonnes both christened were.

To Chad his cell Wulfhære gan go,
And Werebode brought him hitherto.

*Into the chappell entered the king,
And found the sonnes Christ worshippinge.*

Wulfhere, in woodnesse, his sword outdrew,
And both his sonnes anon he slew.

King Wulfhere with Werebode tho',
Buried in grave his sonnes two.

Werebode for vengeance his owne flesh tare,
The Divell him strangled, and to hell bare.

Wulfhere for sorrow was sick,
In bed he lay a dead man like.

S. Ermenild, that blessed queen,
Councelled Wulfhere to shryve him cleane.

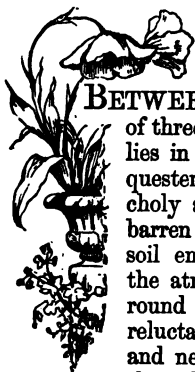
Wulfhere contrite shrift him to Chad,
As Ermenild his wife him councelled had.

Chad bad Wulfhere for his sinne
Abbies to found this rewme within.

Wulfhere in haste performed then
To build what Peada his brother began.



V.



THE ABBEY OF PRÉMONTRE.

BETWEEN Soissons and Laon, at a distance of three leagues from the latter town, there lies in the centre of a thick forest a sequestered spot, remarkable for its melancholy aspect. Sombre rocks display their barren heights, and a marshy unwholesome soil emits humid vapours, which obscure the atmosphere; the trees even which surround this wild spot seem to grow with reluctance; they assume fantastic forms, and never attain the vigour or height of the other forest-trees; their leaves wither and mingle with the moss at their feet, long before the autumnal decline of the year; every thing, in fact, wears a dull and repulsive aspect. If such sterility is known to exist at a time when civilisation changes deserts into populous towns, what must have been the degree of savage wildness, at a period when countries, instead of yielding rich harvests, were covered with inaccessible forests? It must, indeed, have been a powerful motive that could induce a man in those days to penetrate into the interior of such forest-shades and trackless solitudes, when superstitious terror would arrest on their thresholds even the steps of the venturesome huntsman, whose prey had sought refuge within the precincts of the wood. It was nevertheless amongst these rocks and marshes that, towards the year 1130, a holy man, filled with the love of God, laid the foundations of a religious order, whose fame has since become co-extensive with the Christian world.

The origin of the Abbey of Prémontre presents circumstances sufficiently curious to interest the reader of

its chronicles and local traditions. The most accredited opinion is, that it was a remarkable exploit of Enguerrand, second Sire de Coucy, which gave rise to the erection of the monastery. Enguerrand did not inherit the violence and cruelty of his father, and he undertook the task of effacing the remembrance of the evils which the latter had inflicted on the country. Ecclesiastics, and more particularly the convents which had been the victims of former extortions, received from the young lord magnificent indemnities, in consequence of which, even up to the revolution of 1789, Enguerrand was prayed for in the abbeys of Saint André at Cateau Cambrésis, of Saint Vincent, Laon, Foigny, Thenailles, Clerfontaines, &c. &c., which practice having been faithfully observed from his own times, sanctions the belief that he was one of the benefactors of these several establishments.

With regard to Prémontré, the sequel of the story will show that he was venerated as at least one of its founders. The pious ideas entertained by the Lord de Coucy did not hinder him from being an accomplished knight,—valorous in the field of battle, as well as expert in all the chivalrous games of that period. Devotion and warlike chivalry were strangely blended in those days,—the Crusades furnish a remarkable illustration of this; so that the characters of the good barons of the middle ages often appear an extraordinary medley to modern ideas. Enguerrand, beyond most others of his time, burned to distinguish himself in all martial exploits; and amongst the nobles of France he occupied a high place as a brave and generous-hearted warrior.

It happened one day, as he was mounting his horse for the chase, that he was surrounded by a number of peasants, who, in tears, loudly implored his assistance.

"My lord," said they, "take pity on your vassals; their houses are desolate, their flocks are destroyed, their children are exposed to death. A lion of monstrous size roams over the land, devouring all that fall

in his way. You alone, sire, can rid the country of this fearful enemy."

"You did right to apply to me," said the Sire de Coucy to these poor people; "with the help of God, I will do what you require. But tell me where I shall find this monster."

"I will show you the way," said a countryman, advancing.

"Well then, let it be now," exclaimed Enguerrand, spurring on his horse. "And you," said he, addressing the other peasants, "go to the church of St. Sauveur, and pray there for the success of my enterprise."

The brave knight, with his guide, proceeded for nearly two hours; till at last they found themselves on the borders of the forest of Waast, which extended formerly to that of Ardennes. There, knowing that his horse could not proceed along these untrodden passes, he dismounted, and with no other arms save a sword and buckler, followed his guide into the depths of the forest. In proportion as they advanced, the way became more difficult: deep ravines, thick briers, and hollow rocks, seemed to conceal and to be ready to let loose upon them the dreadful animal.

In this way an hour passed without any thing offering itself to their notice. They had arrived at the spot described in the commencement of our story, when the peasant suddenly leaping on one side, cried out in an accent of terror, "There he is!"

"May God help me!" exclaimed Enguerrand, drawing his sword. "It is indeed a lion: *mais tu me l'as de presmontré.*"

Saying these words, the knight boldly attacked the animal, fought with him for a considerable time, and at last despatched him by a tremendous thrust of his sword, with which he ran him through the body. This victory, which freed the land from a terrible scourge, was a source of great joy to all the country round.

The Lord de Coucy returned to his castle preceded by the lion, which was borne triumphantly before him.

The peasants came in a body to return thanks to their lord, and his vassals took the opportunity of renewing their pledge of fealty and homage.

The life of our ancestors was more poetical than ours, their customs more dramatic and picturesque. Each class of society had its own peculiar manners, customs, and traditions, each town its own institutions and usages,—all which derived their character from some memorable event, and caused a singular variety in the customs and institutions of different nations. In these early days of society all was in relief and eloquent to the eye, all was fitted to captivate the imagination. Now-a-days, all things appear clothed in their barest truth; the modern mind disdains the poetical, and accepts only the most simple forms; legal unity pervades all the different grades of society: whereas in the middle ages, before the emancipation of the burghers, and long after, there was a confused system of usages and customs, changed and modified according to the caprice of the feudal lords, or the preferences and tastes of the popular classes.

The dramatic spirit of the twelfth century could not fail to seize on the courageous deed of the Sire de Coucy. On the day of the combat with the lion, Enguerrand received, as we have said, the congratulations of all the people. Touched by these marks of gratitude, he no doubt received them with hospitality; for they almost insensibly adopted the habit of coming three times a year, at Christmas, at Easter, and at Pentecost, to renew their thanks. Enguerrand himself took pleasure in this custom, made regulations for its periodical observance, and enjoined it upon his vassals. But in order to give the celebration more of solemnity, and to confirm to the abbey of Nogent, which was close to his castle, a supremacy which perhaps had never before been well defined, he wished that his vassals should be represented on those occasions by the abbot of this monastery. Enguerrand used at first to offer refreshments *himself* to the crowds of people who resorted to his

castle; but afterwards he appointed, that henceforth the abbot should give them the collation in the open air. The ceremony is thus described by an ancient author :

“ These feasts of rejoicing were then instituted in honour of Enguerrand, and a ceremony prescribed which is still observed by the Abbot of Nogent, who from the foundation of that house has been obliged to present three times a year a number of cakes to the Sire de Coucy, or his officers, in a particular spot, where was sculptured the form and figure of the lion put to death by Enguerrand. The Abbot of Nogent, or his farmer, clothed in the dress of a labourer, with a whip in his hand, appears in the square of the castle, mounted on a light bay horse, that has been used for the plough. His tail and mane are cut close, and his equipments are in complete order. Then he makes several rounds, cracking his whip, and is stopped at every turn, and accosted respectfully; if there is nothing wanting in his equipments, he is then allowed, after having renewed the act of fealty, to distribute the presents of which we have spoken; but if there is any thing amiss in his fittings, even the want of a shoe-nail, the horse is seized and confiscated.”

This scene, odd as it was, was continued until the revolution of 1789; only that the Duke of Orleans, regent under Louis XV., as the local possessor of the title attached to the house of De Coucy, had changed the custom of giving cakes into a supply of grain.

Shortly after this event a memorial of a different kind was raised to the honour of the Sire De Coucy. It happened in the year 1130, that several of the most illustrious persons who then adorned the Church in France were assembled in the province. Some were detained by their sacred duties; others were drawn thither by the renown of their brethren, and by the sympathy so easily established among souls labouring in the same cause. Among these were Guibert then *Abbé of Nogent*, Bartholomew Bishop of Laon, Anselm and his brother Raoul, who were heads of the school of

theology established in that town, and St. Norbert, who had known the Bishop of Laon at Rheims, and whom the latter had not much difficulty in persuading to fix himself in his diocese. A short time after the combat with the lion, the Bishop of Laon recounted this event to St. Norbert, who went soon after in person to congratulate Enguerrand. It would appear that the saint laid open to the Sire De Coucy the views he entertained of founding a monastery in the neighbourhood, and that some negotiations were afterwards carried on between Enguerrand and the Bishop of Laon on the subject; for soon after they offered to assist St. Norbert in raising a monastery in the wild and savage spot where the combat had taken place. The saint agreed. In conformity with the manners of the period, and as a mark of gratitude and respect to the Sire de Coucy, Norbert gave the name of "Prémontré" to his abbey, in memory of the words of Enguerrand when he slew the lion; and then, having repaired to the school of Raoul at Laon, the saint delivered there such a touching discourse, that at the end of the year 1130 the abbey already reckoned forty members. The Sire de Coucy endowed the abbey with a revenue in specie, as well as divers contributions in kind and extensive landed property, as yet uncultivated. These grants once secured to the order, its humble members might be seen devoting themselves, by the daily labour of their hands, to the prompt and cheerful work of building up their homely walls; subduing the stubborn soil, clearing it and draining its marshes, felling trees which had resisted the storms of heaven for centuries, hollowing rocks, and rooting up the brushwood and thick-spread brambles. They had also to encounter the native savage dwellers of the forest,—wolves and wild-boars,—which they succeeded at last in driving from the neighbourhood. At the end of six months a commodious house was erected, and the forty brethren were installed in their new abbey, where they long continued to edify the country by their example. They cultivated a small

piece of land as a kitchen-garden, the produce of which was their principal maintenance. The place soon became celebrated; novices presented themselves in crowds, and many persons of distinguished rank begged as a favour to be received among the number of the brethren. Others made large presents to the monastery, which enabled them to enlarge it; in short, the name of "Prémontré" became in France pre-eminently the symbol of the monastic life; so that requests soon poured in upon Norbert from all quarters to establish branches of this order in other parts of Europe.

Our space will not allow us to trace step by step the increase and extension of the Order of Prémontré, nor to dwell upon its prosperous career; but we may add a few words on its internal organisation. The abbey of Prémontré was, after St. Norbert, governed by an abbot chosen by the religious themselves; and this title gave him jurisdiction over the whole order. At Prémontré all the general and national chapters were held. The primitive rule of the order was nearly as strict as that of St. Bruno; but the successors of St. Norbert made some alterations in the original rules; and in consequence of these changes, each of the houses of the order contained a novice-master, to teach theology and other sciences. The religious also were to undertake the duties of curés; and these regulations added greatly to the lustre and utility of the institution.

It is not without a feeling of regret for his memory that we call to mind the last Superior of the Order of the Prémontrés, the learned Abbé of Lecuy. This venerable man had done much for the order, little foreseeing the deluge of infidelity which would one day swallow up, together with his own, all the venerable orders of France. To the course of study already pursued, he added, a few years before the revolution, the study of grammar, of *belles lettres*, and of mathematics. An enlightened friend of literature, he endowed the *monastery* moreover with a splendid library;—alas! the *hopes and prospects* of this venerable man were destined

to be vain: the revolutionary storm broke over the forest of Prémontré, and all its treasures of literature and science were scattered or destroyed. At the time of its suppression the abbey contained fifty religious, to whom the revolution left neither asylum nor support.

We have mentioned that St. Norbert had been solicited to establish branches of his order in several countries. The provinces of Picardy and Vermandois, which form at this day the department of Aisne, contained many of these abbeys, all founded in the twelfth century. Amongst the number we mention the following, which are from the statistics of Aisne. The abbey of St. Martin, at Laon, was regarded as the second house of the order, and gave a Pope to the Church in the person of Cardinal Albert Moira, known under the name of Gregory VIII. The last prior but one, De Montcey, possessed extensive bibliographical knowledge, and had placed in the library of the abbey an ample collection of choice books. The abbey of St. Martin is now the hospital of invalids. The abbey of Mont St. Martin, near Le Catelet, founded by Garenbert, Canon of St. Quentin, was built in the modern style towards the middle of the last century. This house was occupied in 1816 by Lord Wellington. The abbey of Valsery, two leagues from Villers-Cotterets, was founded in the twelfth century by Hugues, Lord of La Ferté-Milon. The church attached to it contained several monuments, amongst others, that of Catherine of Valois, wife of Charles of France, Count of Valois, and that of Margaret of Sicily. The last, though not the least, amongst the abbeys of the reformed rule, were those of Yves at Braisne, of Beaurieux, and of Genlis. The abbey of Prémontré was rebuilt, with considerable alterations, towards the middle of the eighteenth century. It was a magnificent edifice, in which architecture was displayed in all its grandeur. There was, in particular, a beautiful carved staircase, distinguished for its boldness and elegance, which formed

the admiration of connoisseurs; and it was said to have been the production of a simple workman, named "Bonhomme." But the most remarkable memorial was the tomb placed near the high altar in the church of the monastery,—an effigy of a knight, in white marble, having at his feet a lion couchant, and bearing on his shield the name of Enguerrand de Coucy, the hero of the combat already described, and one of the founders of the abbey. This monument has now disappeared, the memory of Enguerrand is forgotten; and the next generation will perhaps be ignorant that a celebrated abbey ever existed in that spot, where now is to be seen only a manufactory of glass! The age of industry and progress retains no memorials of the palmy days of religion and chivalry!



VI.



LEGEND OF ST. WINIFRIDE.

LONG years ago—the old chronicle declares about the year 660—there lived a very noble and powerful lord whose name was Thevith. It chanced one day as he sat in his ancient manor, looking over the slopes of golden corn which shone like gems in the midst of the wild mountain land, and watching how the little fishing-boats skimmed over the smooth waters of the Dee, that the porter entered quietly, and said that a pilgrim stood without desiring to speak to him; adding, “My lord, from his aspect, and the great holiness of his bearing, I shrewdly guess this to be the venerable Beuno, whose high fame of sanctity has already reached us.” The lord of the manor went quickly to the gate to bid his guest welcome with his own lips; for in those days of faith the presence of a holy man was deemed a boon beyond the price of gold. But even Thevith did not guess that, as St. Beuno crossed his threshold, the windows of heaven were opened to rain down blessings on his house. As soon as the saintly man had received the salutations of his host, he fixed his eyes on him, and spake as follows :

“My son, God hath, by a very fervent and peculiar inspiration, drawn me hither from His other servants, with whom I lived elsewhere in great content, to perform some great good to you and yours; therefore, in the name of God, I humbly entreat a small part of your inheritance to raise thereon a church, where others, with myself, may daily pray for your safety.”

And Thevith opened his heart wide to the inspira-

tion of God and the power of the saint's words. He instantly gave him the manor in which he then lived for ever as an offering to God; he helped with all his heart in rearing the sacred edifice; and then, as a far more precious gift than gold or lands, he committed his only child, a tender virgin, to the instructions of the saint. Then he chose for himself a dwelling on a hill opposite, that, when he could not be with the holy man, he might at least look towards him, and be spiritually united with him in the perpetual service of God.

Very beautiful was it to see the saint and the child together. Her place was ever at his feet upon the altar-steps; and her childish countenance, so royal in its look of innocence, would glow and kindle as the heavenly teachings of St. Beuno entered her heart. Very fair she was even in this world's beauty; but it was not that which attracted every one so strangely to her: the meek light which shone in those deep blue eyes, and the lustre which seemed reflected from the golden hair which swept her brow, were caught from communings with another world; and men were wont to sign themselves as she passed, and check the loud jest or angry tone as though aware of an angel's presence. So quickly did this fair lily grow and flourish beside the streams of living water with which her saintly father fed her soul, that while she was still of most tender age, she steadfastly resolved to consecrate her life, in all its virgin purity, to Jesus Christ, to whom the young love of her courageous heart was entirely given. Fearing lest her parents might grieve at her resolution, since the only hope of the continuance of their race lay in her accepting some of the princely alliances proposed for her, she went one day to the cell of St. Beuno, and laying her whole soul before him, she begged him to intercede with her parents, and entreat them not to disturb by their opposition a resolution which was unalterably fixed. Great was the joy of St. Beuno at finding the precious fruits which had sprung from the seed he had sown in this fruitful soil, and willingly did he undertake to gain her parents' appro-

bation. Thevith showed the same royal magnificence of heart on this occasion as he did when earthly lands and riches were asked of him: he relinquished at once every hope that he should see his race perpetuated in Winifride, and be able to leave his princely domains to her children. "Since," said he, "our fair and holy child has chosen the Son of the mighty God for her bridegroom, we choose Him likewise for our heir;" and he dispensed immediately in alms and charitable foundations the ample dowry he destined for her. And now the happiness of Winifride's life was complete: she was looked on as an angel of consolation in the home of her devoted parents; she was cherished with especial care by the great saints of her time, as the child of predilection; and Jesus, her celestial Bridegroom, delighted to flood her heart with heavenly sweetnesses, so that the very sound of that wondrous Name would cause such a jubilee within her, that her blushing and tears would discover the secrets of her soul to those around.

One morning, Thevith and all his people were assisting at the holy offices in the chapel in the valley, and Winifride was alone at home preparing some incense to be used in the celebration of Mass. As she was joyously raising up her heart to God, and seasoning her labour with the sweet tones of her young clear voice, Prince Caradoc, the son of King Alan, stood before her, and saluting her courteously, said he had come to speak with the Lord Thevith, her father. Winifride, wholly unconscious in her childlike innocence of the real purport of his visit, answered that her father would soon be returned from the church, and then bidding him farewell, modestly retired. He followed her, however, and pouring out the tale of his love with most impassioned words, he swore with a fearful oath that he would not leave her till he had won her consent to be his bride. Terrified at his look and manner, the Saint preserved her courage through this deadly peril, and meekly requested *leave to withdraw into her chamber, there to put on a more fitting attire, and await the return of her father*

before concluding such noble espousals. Thrown off his guard for a moment, Prince Caradoc let her depart; but a few minutes had scarcely passed when the truth flashed upon his mind, and rushing to the door, he violently burst it open, and found that that fair and innocent dove had indeed escaped the snare of the fowler. Foaming with rage, he leapt on his horse's back, and spurred down the hill towards the little chapel of the valley. Winifride had all but gained the place of refuge, when her fierce pursuer came upon her. When she saw escape was impossible, that young tender virgin showed by her majestic bearing and noble words the courage that lay hidden in her soul. Caradoc, with his sword drawn in his hand, overmastered by rage and passion, vowed he would sever her head from her body, and deform the face he formerly had loved, if she would not yield to his honourable proposals.

"Prince," replied the maiden, "know that I am already espoused to the Son of the King of Heaven—in power, beauty, and goodness, incomparably greater than the kings of the earth. For His love, which I have tasted, will I ever remain faithful to Him in the constant affection of my unaltered heart. Gladly will I lose my head and my life for refusing to admit any other lover than Himself. Neither your terrors nor your threats shall draw me from the sweetness of His love, or make me go other than I have promised, in virgin truth and purity, to Him."

She spoke, and folding her hands over her bosom, waited for the end. No glance shot from her eye to tell the natural tremor of a maiden of such tender years. There she stood upon the lonely mountain-side, calm as the marble statue beneath its fretted niche. For a moment Caradoc was overawed by the unshaken bearing of his victim. He saw her turn from him, and again descend towards the chapel; her very foot was *on the sacred threshold*, when, stung with wounded *pride and mad with rage to behold her escaping him for ever*, he gave one sudden bound upon his charger,

and whirling his sword in the air, the body of the virgin martyr fell lifeless upon the pavement.

St. Beuno was preparing to say Mass, and the people were all kneeling around the altar, when the solemn stillness was broken by a loud fierce cry, succeeded by the sudden plunging of horse's feet. Startled from their prayers, they looked up; and who can describe the cries of horror which filled the holy place as they beheld the gory head which lay on the pavement before them! Who can paint the agony of the parents as they recognised by those golden waves of hair, and the smile which played upon those parted lips, their sweet holy child, lying there so cruelly murdered before them! St. Beuno descended the altar-steps, and taking up the sacred head of his beloved pupil and daughter, he bathed it with his tears, grieving bitterly that this fragrant lily should have been cut down before her solemn consecration to her Spouse, which was shortly to have taken place. Then moving to the door, he beheld the author of this cruel deed standing proudly by, wiping his bloody sword upon the grass, and wholly unrepentant for his sin. When he saw that he cared neither for God nor man, the Spirit of the Lord came upon St. Beuno, and raising his arms to heaven, he pronounced the Divine judgment upon him; because he had foully slain the virgin spouse of the Lord, because he had defiled the holy place by shedding blood therein, and because for all these things he would not repent, but rather gloried in them in the wickedness of his heart. Struck by the hand of God, the prince fell dead before them; and tradition says, that even while those around were gazing in horror on the corpse, it disappeared. Whether the earth had opened, or devils carried it away to its own place, they knew not; but in no consecrated ground, on no mountain or valley trodden by the foot of man, was the unhallowed dust of the murderer committed to the earth. St. Beuno returned into the church; but his eye was bright with supernatural light, and his voice *sounded like a trumpet*, as he bade the people cease

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their tears and lamentations, for the arm that had raised Lazarus from the dead was not shortened now.

"Truly," said he, "this princely spouse hath no need of the company of us miserable mortals, being, as she is, highly exalted into the bridal-chamber of the Eternal King; but for our sakes, and for the great glory of God, pray ye that this blessed one may yet return among us to be enriched with a yet more plentiful harvest of good works, and a yet brighter crown. Truly hath host and sacrifice been offered here this day, and the victim lieth even on the altar-steps; but now shall that Host be offered up for the living and the dead, the Lamb slain from the beginning; and now shall it be seen, O virgin spouse of the Lamb! how precious hath been the shedding of thy blood in His sight."

Then St. Beuno reverently took the virgin's head and laid it to the body, and, breathing on the cold marble brow, he covered it with his cloak; then ascending the altar-steps, he began to celebrate the tremendous mysteries; and men held their breath in awe, for they sensibly felt the presence of the Lord, and saw the heavens open. Scarcely had he concluded, when St. Winifride, waking as though from a deep sleep, raised her hand to her face and wiped away the dust and blood which had gathered on her brow. She brought with her a token from Paradise; for a circle of purest white was presently remarked upon her throat, where the sword had severed her head from her body. O joy beyond all joys, as the happy parents pressed her to their hearts, and then, with sacred awe, retired back to gaze on her who had seen the face of God, and whose ears had drunk in the songs of the angelic choirs!

And earth sent forth its voice of gratitude for the fruitful benediction of the martyr's blood; for a crystal stream sprang up where the head had rested, which for *its wondrous* powers of cure has been revered from *that day even unto this*, as the Holy Well of St. Win-

fride. Summer has never been able to dry it up, winter has never bound it in its icy chain; it flows on with even and untiring force, watering and fertilising the land it traverses, until its waters lose themselves in the sea. An exquisite Gothic building of Henry VII.'s time now covers the well; and the heart must be cold indeed who can stand beneath those solemn arches, and look down on that wonderful water rising so silently yet so powerfully every moment, and then upon the numerous crutches and litters fastened to the groinings of the old roof (tokens of sufferings left behind them by the pilgrims), and not thank God that in one spot at least of English ground the ancient spirit of pilgrimage still lingers. The unbroken tradition of sanctity comes upon the soul as a refreshing breeze from better and happier times; and it would be worth while to make the pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Winifride only to gain the keen consciousness of the reality of those deeds of faith and holiness with which this now barren and desolate soil was once so fruitful,—worth while only to see the pilgrims of to-day kneel as they did a thousand years ago, and cross themselves to pray, and then bathe in the Holy Well, to find the cure which no human aid had been able to give.

Little remains to be told of the history of St. Winifride. The event of her life had passed, and it was no wonder that that little hour had transformed the child into the perfect saint, the illuminated mistress and guide of souls. It was natural that she whose ears had heard the first notes of that wondrous canticle which not all the elect shall sing, but only the virgin train, should have great power to kindle in others the ardent desire for that more exalted way, and that she should quickly gather round her a company of noble and chaste virgins, emulous of that reward which had been once within her grasp. Very shortly after her martyrdom, St. Beuno took her to the fountain which had miraculously risen at the time, and, as they sat together on a large stone near the well (called to this day

St. Beuno's stone), he told her that the time was come when he must depart to other scenes, and leave her to carry on his labours, and guide others fruitfully in those truths which he had taught her. Then pointing to the fountain, he said,

"Listen, dear child and daughter, to three things which I shall foretell concerning this monument of your martyrdom, to the greater glory of your heavenly Spouse. The first, that these stones shall never be washed from their bloody stains, but shall ever retain the same as triumphant signs of your blood, most gratefully here poured out in defence of your virgin purity. The second is, that never shall any person devoutly bathe three times in this fountain, asking any temporal blessing, or freedom from any spiritual or corporal distress, to be obtained by your merits and prayers for him, without being made partaker of his desire; or else, passing by death out of this life, he shall in another world, after a more ample manner, reap the fruits of his prayers. The third is, that after my departure God will give me a cell near the sea-shore, in a remote place of this island; and when you would send me any letters or tokens (as His Divine Majesty would have you do, and I also do entreat the same of you once at least every year), cast them only into the stream of this fountain, and they will, passing into the ocean by many creeks, be divinely conveyed unto me. And these graces, of which I have forewarned you, shall be divulged gloriously unto the world's end, to the greater honour of your Divine Spouse." Then taking leave of her with many sweet and holy words, he told her the will of God was, that he should depart, and she should see his face no more. "As for my poor self, I shall go whither God's Spirit will guide me, and ever retain in my heart and soul a fatherly and loving memory of you."

Long and deeply did St. Winifride mourn for the loss of her saintly master; and it may be well believed *she did not forget the yearly token of her dutiful love*

which he had asked of her. Nearly a year after his departure, she embroidered, with the help of her sisters, a fair vestment; and when it was completed, she went with it to the well side, and bending over it she softly murmured her wishes to her heavenly Spouse, tracing in the clear waters with her fair virginal hands the holy sign of faith; then wrapping her precious offering in a woollen cloth, she committed it to the stream, saying, "O holy father! I send you here, according to your command and my promise, this small token of my love to you." The obedient waters bore it safely through many a creek and winding way into the sea, and it was cast upon the shore fifty long miles away at the feet of the holy man, who took it up with great joy of heart, and giving God and St. Winifride thanks, caused it to be carefully preserved in his church for the use of himself and his brethren. And never did she fail in this yearly token of her loving remembrance, till she knew by revelation that the spirit of her saintly preceptor was with God. How "beautiful and calm and free she moved in her young wisdom after this event, which left her, as she said, a poor orphan child without a nurse," it comes not within the limits of this short sketch to tell. Kneeling on the spot of her martyrdom, she received an inspiration to go forth into the lonely mountain country, and there await what God should say unto her. At last she was directed to a certain monastery of holy virgins, who received her with very great rejoicings among them, and soon after chose her as their mother and abbess. There she brought to its perfection the rich coronet of holy deeds and merits for which she had been permitted to return to earth; and there, after many full years, amidst the tears of her devoted children, she departed in the calm of innocence to her rest.

VII.

THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION.

LEGEND exists, with regard, if not to the institution, yet, at least, to the introduction into our country of one of the festivals in honour of the holy Mother of God, which has a special interest to us at this time. Other festivals have been ordained by the Church as testimonies of her gratitude for great deliverances; but there is this peculiarity attaching to the Festival of the Immaculate Conception, that, if we may trust the legends concerning it,—and that we are about to give rests on no less authority than the great St. Anselm, who relates it as an event which took place in his own time,—Heaven itself took part in the propagation of this devotion, and the appointment of its holyday and office.

England was but newly subject to the Norman Conqueror; and the rapidity with which he had seized possession of the island, no less than the firmness with which he retained it in his grasp, excited the rage and jealousy of some of its former masters. The Danes had not forgotten that they too had a prior claim of conquest; and considering themselves stripped of their lawful heritage by the new intruders, they took secret measures for re-possessioning themselves of their former power in the land, and commenced the equipment of a formidable fleet, with which they purposed descending on the eastern coasts. Their preparations, however, were not conducted with such secrecy, but that they reached the ears of William; and he determined to *despatch an embassy to the Danish court, for the purpose both of treating with them on favourable terms, and*

of ascertaining the truth of the rumours which had reached him. The person chosen for this mission was the Abbot Helsinus, a man of great sagacity, formerly of the monastery of Rheims, but who had followed William into England, and enjoyed no small share of his confidence. He acquitted himself of his charge with the skill and discretion that might have been expected from his reputation; and after a short stay at the Danish court, he prepared to return to England, and set out for that purpose in one of the small and ill-constructed vessels of the period. And if we look at any prints representing those vessels, whatever we may think of the naval skill of our forefathers, it certainly raises our ideas of the courage they exhibited in crossing vast seas in such extraordinary constructions. We are puzzled, as we gaze at such representations, to think how they could have got along at all, where all the men could have been stowed away, and how it was that the masts, top-heavy with their towers and garrisons of soldiers, did not tumble about the ears of the luckless crew. And if such machines seem dangerous to our notions even in fair weather, we need not be surprised, if at the approach of a tempest there was seldom much hope of escape from winds and waves; so that when the crew was Christian they oftener had recourse to their prayers than to their oars.

Such a chance befell the vessel which was bearing Helsinus back to the shores of England. He had already accomplished the greater part of the voyage, when there arose a mighty contrary wind and the waters were agitated by a violent storm. The sailors were exhausted with fatigue, the oars were broken, the ropes torn in pieces, the sails flying in strips, and all on board gave themselves up to despair, looking for nothing else than to be speedily swallowed up in the foaming waves that tossed their clumsy vessel to and fro like a helpless log; and so, to use the language of the golden legend, in which the story has been inserted by Blessed James of Voragine, "no longer being able to look for the sal-

vation of their bodies, they took thought but for that of their souls, recommending themselves, with great clamouring, to God and the Blessed Virgin, the refuge of the unfortunate and the distressed." Suddenly there was a great cry from one of the sailors; something was coming over the waters towards the foundering vessel. It was neither ship nor boat; but as they caught glimpses of it through the blinding rain and the thick darkness, occasionally illuminated only by the glaring lightning, it seemed to have the likeness of a man walking on the billows, as quietly and calmly as though they were a soft and verdant lawn. As he drew nearer they observed that he was clad in pontifical habits, and had a grave and venerable aspect. He came close up to the ship, still treading on the sea, as it raged about him, with a firm and unshaken step; and when he was so near that they could discern the very sparkling of his eye and the waving of his snowy beard, his voice was heard clear and sonorous above the tumult of the waters, as he bade Helsinus fear nothing, but come to him where he stood. The abbot was a man of faith, as well as sagacity; he threw himself from the side of the vessel without a moment's hesitation, and, borne up on the surface of the water, boldly approached the spot where the heavenly messenger awaited him.

"Helsinus," he said again, and his voice sounded soft and sweet amidst the jar of the angry elements, "do you desire to escape the horrors of shipwreck, and to return safe and unhurt to your country?"

"That indeed do I desire right heartily," replied the abbot; "but, methinks, there are small hopes that I may do so."

"There are no hopes if you trust to your sails and oars," said the stranger; "but know that I am sent to you by my sovereign lady, the ever-blessed Mary, Mother of God, whose help you have implored with so much fervour and devotion; and if you will do even as *I shall bid you*, both you and your companions shall *escape the danger which now threatens you.*"

"I know not, good father, what you may prescribe," answered Helsinus; "but if you be a messenger of her whose name we have so instantly invoked, and if you promise us deliverance from this peril, and a safe return to port, there is little that either I myself, or those yonder in the ship, would think too great to do at your command."

"Then," said the stranger, "what Mary asks of you is this: promise, in my presence, and in that of Jesus Christ, and all His saints, that should He bring you safe to the English shore, you will henceforth solemnly keep every year the Feast of the Conception of His Blessed Mother; and that, moreover, you will preach and procure the celebration of the same by others, wheresoever you may be able so to do."

"Good father," replied the astonished abbot, "I would willingly do what you require; but I know not the day on which the feast may fall: it certainly has never yet been kept in Rheims."

"It is the sixth day of the Ides of December," answered the stranger, "and that is the day whereon it is to be celebrated."

"And what office must I say?" continued Helsinus; "the Breviary hath none such that I wot of."

"Thou shalt recite the office of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, substituting only the word 'Conception' for that of 'Nativity' wheresoever it occurs;" and with these words he disappeared.

Even as he did so the tempest subsided, the sea became calm and smooth, and the moon, breaking through the clouds, cast a clear and joyous light upon the waters, so that the mariners could see both to guide their vessel and to repair the damage it had sustained. And so, a favourable wind springing up, they reached the coasts of England without further danger or difficulty, and all landed, with great joy and gratitude, on the shores they had so lately despaired of ever seeing again.

As to Helsinus, he did not forget his promise; he

went about through all parts publishing what had happened, so that the story of his deliverance, and the Divine command he received, were soon familiar things in the mouths of the English people; and in many of the churches of the island the Feast of the Conception was celebrated on the day and in the manner prescribed by the messenger of Mary. In the monastery of Rheims, where Helsinus bore the chief rule, it was from that time kept with extraordinary solemnity; and "to the day of his death," says Blessed James, "he carefully watched that it should be so kept with the uttermost devotion."

This is the story which St. Anselm gives in one of his letters, and which Blessed James has copied from that authority; he adds another, as being also told by some as the origin of the celebration of the feast in France. We can scarce do better than give it in his own words:

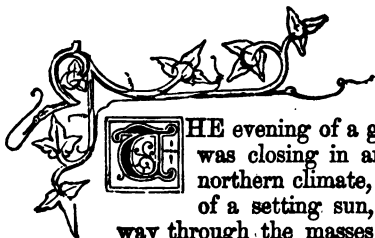
"At the time of the illustrious Charles, King of France, there lived a certain noble, a relative of the King of Hungary, who had the most lively devotion towards the Mother of God, and who regularly every day recited her office. Now, by the advice of his parents, he was about to espouse a certain lady of admirable beauty; and when they had received the nuptial benediction, he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten that day to recite the office of the Virgin; wherefore, sending his bride home to his house, and causing all the company to leave the church, he himself remained behind in prayer at the foot of the altar; and whilst he was praying, and singing the praises of the Mother of God, when he came to the Anthem, 'Thou art all fair, O daughter of Jerusalem,' suddenly Mary herself stood before him, having at her side two angels, one of whom held her right hand, and the other her left; and she said to him, 'If I am fair, why then do you renounce me, and seek another spouse? am I not lovelier far than *she*? and is there any one who surpasses me in beauty?' Then he, being filled with wonder, answered, saying:

'Thy beauty doth indeed surpass all else that is in the world, and thou art raised above all the choirs of the angels, and above the heaven of heavens; what wilt thou therefore that I should do?' And she replied: 'If thou shalt consent to renounce the spouse thou hast just taken, thou shalt have me for thy spouse in the kingdom of heaven; and if each year thou shalt celebrate the Feast of my Conception with great solemnity on the sixth of the Ides of December, thou shalt be crowned with me in the kingdom of my Son.' And having said these words, she disappeared. Then he determined not to return to his house; but without sending any word thereof to his friends and family, he retired into a certain abbey in a distant country, and there took the monastic habit; and a little while after he was elected Bishop and Patriarch of Aguilá; and so long as he lived, he caused the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin to be celebrated with its octave, and every where constantly recommended the keeping of the same."

It is perhaps unnecessary to remind our readers that the sixth of the Ides of December corresponds to the day on which the feast has constantly been celebrated throughout the whole Church, and that the office indicated to the Abbot Helsinus is that which is still in use in the Dominican order.



VIII

THE CONSECRATION OF WESTMINSTER
ABBEY.

THE evening of a gloomy autumn day was closing in amid the mists of a northern climate, and the feeble rays of a setting sun, which made their way through the masses of dark and heavy clouds that were piled on the western horizon, shone over a scene as wild and desolate as any which the imagination could depict. A broad river rolled through the low flat land that lay on either side, and which as far as the eye could reach presented nothing but the dreary aspect of an uncultivated waste. Towards the east, however, the long lines of marsh were broken by a considerable number of houses clustered together on the river-bank. The misty atmosphere hung over this spot in a heavier cloud; whilst some dark objects on the water, which seemed to be vessels of a larger kind than those used in the inland navigation of the stream, indicated the neighbourhood of a town of some importance. Even further to the west there might be noticed some rude huts scattered about on the water's edge; but their presence scarcely had the power to dissipate the dreariness of the landscape, which impressed the beholder with feelings of no ordinary kind; the wide stream in many places overflowed its marshy boundaries, and breaking into other channels, formed islands in its course; and on one of these, of larger dimensions than the others, *appeared several buildings, some newly erected, and others of a heavy and antique character, which were*

falling into ruins, and overgrown by the thorny thickets that covered the ground and gave the spot its popular name of Thorney Island. For, indeed, it is no new settlement of the far-west which we are here describing; the wide sluggish river, tangled with weeds and rolling on through that bleak and desolate waste, is neither the Mississippi nor the Missouri,—it is our own busy Thames; and those clustered houses to the east are all that the seventh century can show us of the boundaries of London.

Into one of the miserable huts already mentioned as scattered about beyond the limits of the town, we must now invite our readers to enter. It is the dwelling of Seward the fisherman, and he is even now in the act of preparing to set out for an expedition up the stream; though the hour is late, and the grey and lowering sky gives promise of a stormy night. He is standing on the clay-floor of his rude kitchen, gathering some large nets over his shoulders, and, as it seems, deaf to the remonstrances, urged, however, in no gentle tone, of a woman, whom, by the freedom of her tongue, we may take to be his wife.

“Heard you ever such folly?” she exclaimed, as though appealing for support in a defeated argument to some third party; though in truth her husband was the only other occupant of the apartment,—“to go up stream at such an hour as this, with the wind-clouds heaping up like feathers, and not a fish moving in the channel, as he knows, or might know; for he has been after them the live-long day, with nothing to show for his labour but two starveling eels. And then to talk of a woman’s stubbornness; I trow, if they be stubborn, they learnt it from their lords;” and the good dame threw her hands into the air as though she had finished with the subject.

If she counted, however, on gaining any thing by her apparent abandonment of the offensive, and trusted that the self-love inherent in human nature would move Seward to have a last word in the debate, she was mistaken; for the fisherman was an East Saxon, and had the

proverbial phlegm of his race. He went on at his work with the nets without suffering himself to be disturbed by the tempting opportunity of a retort; and shouldering his burden, at length moved towards the door.

"A wild evening truly," he said as he opened it, and looked out on the fast-gathering darkness; "three hours hence, good dame, you may bid Eadbald show a light on the shore below, for I fancy the moon will do little to-night to help us homeward; and if by that time the fish will not rise in the Thorney Creek, I shall not try the higher stream."

"The Thorney Creek!" almost screamed his wife, while something of terror mingled with the shrewish sharpness of her tone. "Now, is it not enough that thou shouldst set wind and darkness at defiance, without tempting the fiends and goblins of yonder haunted spot? The Thorney Creek! where none but fools would go by day; and thou speakest of a three-hours' fishing in it at such a time as this, when thou knowest well Mellitus himself were a bold man if he dared put his foot there after sunset!"

"Wife," said Seward, who evidently winced a little at the mention of the goblins, "thou speakest without thought, as is the manner of thy sex. The fiends had Thorney Island for their own a while since, and well they might, so long as the accursed temples of the heathens were the only buildings on its soil; but thou knowest very well that the holy Mellitus hath redeemed it from the enemy, and that even to-morrow the goodly minster he hath raised will be hallowed to the blessed Peter, under whose favour," and he crossed himself devoutly, "I shall fear neither fiend nor wizard; the rather that this night's fishing is for the table of his own guests; for King Sebert is to dine with all his train within the abbey, and the two starveling eels thou speakest of are all the fish as yet provided for the banquet."

"Well, go thy way, and see what comes of it," replied his wife; "and if thou gettest not something *more than eels for thy labour*, my name is not Ebba."

Eadbald shall show the light; and I trow thou wilt be over-glad to see it, if the fiends have not carried thee to Friesland first, as they did to Swegn the fowler and a score of others."

"Swegn was a heathen, and it were no great wonder that the fiends had power over their worshipper," returned Seward; "but thou and I, good Ebba, have received the baptism of faith, and to such the spirits are subject, as Mellitus hath often taught; and their wiles can injure none who defend themselves with the cross of Christ. Therefore lay aside thy fears, and remember that Eadbald brings the light, as I have bid thee;" and so saying, the fisherman left the hut and closed the door behind him.

Notwithstanding the boldness of his speech, it must be owned that Ebba's words had not been without their effect; for Thorney Island had indeed a bad reputation in those days, and Seward, however prepared to do battle with the fiends, was certainly not one to deny their existence. The night, too, did not promise to be such as would dispel any supernatural fears which had been excited: the river mist wrapt every thing in a gloomy haze; and the wind, as it came sweeping over the dreary and desolate marsh, sighed among the reeds that grew by the water's edge with the sound of a spirit in pain. Seward unfastened his little boat from the shore, and pushed into the channel; but his heart failed him when he was about to turn its head towards the Thorney Creek.

"I will try the southern bank first," he muttered; "it will be time enough to give a last cast in the creek if the fish will not rise yonder;" and so saying, he pulled over to the further bank of the river, and commenced his work.

But the fish did not rise; the hours went by slowly and heavily, and still each cast of his net gave the same discouraging result, and Seward began to doubt whether it had not been wiser for once to have stayed at home by *his blazing fire* than to have wasted his time to so little

purpose. He felt ashamed at the thought of returning home and acknowledging to Ebba that after all he had never gone near the Thorney Island; and so, gathering up his resolution, he prepared to get in his nets, and try his luck at the dreaded spot before making his way back for the night. Even where he then was, he could see through the murky folds of mist the dark masses of the old ruins, and the outline of the newer buildings, which rose exactly opposite to the place where his little boat was moored.

Those ruins, the object of so much fear to the Saxon Christians, were all that remained of the great temple of Apollo, which formerly occupied the site. Long since abandoned and falling into decay, as they were, the terrible rumours that were associated with the place, and the tales of spectres and fiends that were said to haunt the scenes of the old pagan worship, were so numerous and so generally believed, that the island had been given up by common consent to the possession of its demon-masters. And the thorns that overgrew it with such luxuriance had given it the popular name which describes something of its savage desolation; for it was, in the language of the monkish historians, "a terrible and woful place." King Sebert, however, who, conjointly with Mellitus, the companion of St. Augustine, and the first Bishop of London, had introduced the Christian faith among the East Saxons, and who had already raised a church in honour of St. Paul on the site of the temple of Diana, had resolved in like manner to beat the enemy of paganism on his own ground, by the consecration of a Christian altar in the "terrible place;" and the minster and monastery of St. Peter's abbey were already completed, and awaited their solemn dedication on the very day following that on which our story opens. But the hallowing had not yet taken place; and the Christian associations were *yet too fresh* to chase away the superstitious dread *which the place inspired among all the fishermen of the Thames.*

Nevertheless Seward, as we have said, was preparing manfully to encounter all the terrors of the haunted spot, rather than go home empty-handed and own himself in the wrong; when, as he was in the act of unmooring his boat, that he might cross to the northern shore, a sound came from the bank near which he had been lying, as of a voice calling his name. He listened, and it came again, "Seward! Seward!" There was no mistake. Instead, therefore, of leaving this side of the river, he pulled closer in, endeavouring to make out whence the voice could have proceeded. Nor was his eye long before it discovered something like a human form standing on the bank, beckoning to him with its hand, as though bidding him approach.

"Who calls there?" said Seward; "and what do you seek at this hour of night?"

"Fear nothing," answered the voice; and it was one of wonderful power, for it came over the water as clearly as though the speaker were by his side; "I do but seek a passage to the further shore; and if you are ready to give it, your trouble shall be well rewarded."

"That will I," answered Seward without hesitation; saying to himself, as he endeavoured to get within reach of the stranger, "it will be no ill luck to pass the Thorney Creek in company; and if he pays well, the silver will silence my good Ebba's tongue as well as though I brought her river-salmon;" and with these words he pulled his boat beneath the bank where his intended passenger was standing. "Have a care of the weeds, good friend," he cried; "they are over-slippery, and thou mightest well miss thy footing;" but before the words had left his lips, the stranger was in the boat, and seated on one of its benches, passing over the obstacles that lay in his way with a marvellous lightness and firmness of step.

"He is used to the river, that is certain," said Seward to himself, whose admiration of his guest's agility had set him quite at ease. "Where will your nobleness land?" he asked; "doubtless you have missed the

ferry, and will be for the path to the city, which is lower down the stream."

"I have not missed the ferry," answered the stranger; "and you will land me in Thorney Island, where you will wait awhile for my return; it will repay your trouble, though the hour is a little late."

"It is one of the king's followers, I make no doubt," muttered Seward. "He is preparing for to-morrow's ceremony; though it is strange he came from the southern bank;" and he began to scan his passenger with a curious eye.

The faint light from a clouded moon enabled him to discern no more than that he was of a noble and majestic bearing; that his venerable beard floated far upon his breast, and that his person was wrapped in a thick mantle, which prevented any part of his dress from being seen. Seward would gladly have questioned him, and engaged him in conversation; but an involuntary feeling of respect held him in silence, and a few strokes of the oar brought him within a boat's length of the shores of Thorney Island.

"The tide must have changed within the hour," he said, as he ran the little skiff along the bank; "for we have come over faster than the water-fowl. Is your nobleness bent on landing?" he added, perceiving the stranger rising from his seat. "Thorney Island is but a weird place after nightfall."

"I have business here," replied the stranger. "Thou, good Seward, wilt await me on this spot; and fear nothing, for the spirits of darkness have had their day, and there are better times in store for Thorney Island;" and so, with the same firm and rapid step, he passed over the benches, and was standing on the shore before Seward could raise a hand to help him.

He watched his figure till it was lost among the thickets; and then, pushing out from the shore, he endeavoured to wile away the time and keep off unpleasant thoughts by fresh casts of his nets,—all as fruitless, however, as those he had made before. He looked

round him, and strained his eye, if happily he could catch sight of his late companion; but no one was to be seen. The moon, as it broke with fitful gleams from behind the thick masses of drifting clouds, fell on the pillars of the ruined temple, which rose close by the water's edge. Within them the darkness seemed blacker than elsewhere, and the very shadow cast upon the river had a gloom and mystery of its own.

"Now, by Woden!" growled Seward between terror and impatience, "I will give him but five minutes more for his business, and will find my way back without him; the fish are sleeping or bewitched, so in with the nets!" Thus saying, he stooped over the edge to commence the work of hauling them in.

As he did so, the reflection of a brilliant light struck his eye: it must be Eadbald's signal; no, that could hardly be, unless he were strangely out in his reckoning. The light came from the island, and from the minster window,—he could discern the very outline of the heavy mullions, and the great round arch above them; what could it mean? But his speculations on the matter were soon lost in a wonder which swallowed up even the emotion of supernatural fear which mingled with his surprise. Even as he gazed in the direction of the minster, the small ray of light he had at first perceived burst into a vast and sudden illumination of the entire building: from every window and opening there streamed forth a light more brilliant far than day; and yet with a yellow golden hue, as though cast from a multitude of torches. The very mist which hung about the marshy ground caught the reflection of that wonderful light, and was transformed by it into a cloudy glory that floated about the walls, so that they scarcely seemed to touch or to belong to the earth, and gave the whole scene the effect of some enchanted or celestial vision.

Nor was it long before another of the astonished fisherman's senses was equally engaged with that of sight; for as he sat gazing in mute bewilderment on

the incomprehensible scene, the sound of distant singing broke upon his ear, at first faint and indistinct, but swelling into louder harmony, and that of so exquisite and extraordinary a character that he scarce knew what to think.

"Holy Peter!" he exclaimed, "what if my wife's words be true, and the fiends have carried me to Friesland? for well I wot this is little like Thorney Island, which was ever a dark and dreary place, and where one heard no sound but that of the screech-owl. But then," he added, "neither would the goblins of the accursed pagans sing like that; for it is the self-same measure wherewith the Roman monks so wonderfully wrought on the ears of Ethelbert; I have heard it from Mellitus' own lips."

He listened again, and it even seemed as though he could catch the very words they sang;—there was a pause and break in the melody, and the sound as of a single voice, loud, clear, and sonorous, like that of his passenger from the opposite shore, as it intoned the words, "*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*" "*Amen,*" added Seward; "those were Christian words; and as I am a Christian man, I will see what this singing and torch-bearing may mean. The boat will stay where she is, safe enough; and my strange passenger is doubtless busy with the rest of them, and will not be back before me;" and with these words he jumped ashore, and making his way through the thicket to the walls of the brightly-illuminated minster, contrived to climb to one of the windows, from whence he could look down on the whole scene within.

A great ecclesiastical ceremony is doubtless a splendid spectacle; and when it is performed by night, and the golden vestments and jewelled mitres flash in the brightness of a thousand tapers, and the clouds of incense float away into the dim heights of the darkened roof, and all the light is centered about the altar, there is something yet grander and more mystic in its beauty. And yet all this was little to the magnificence that

fell on the eye of the astonished Seward. Were they indeed priests, those venerable figures, whose heads were encircled with auroles of glory, that dazzled him as he gazed? And the choir—robed indeed, yet not with linen garments, like the singing-boys of Sebert's church, but, as it seemed, in ethereal vestments made and fashioned out of light—it was as if airy wings moved about their shoulders; and the music, which poured from their lips in such full rich tones, told him that he listened to no earthly strain; heaven seemed moving below him, and its harmonies were floating in the air; and Seward felt that the wonderful choristers could be none other than a company of angels. They were winding in procession round the church, the censers casting forth their sweet and balmy clouds of perfume, and the lights they carried gleaming through the vast nave like stars. He watched them as they came, and the line of vested priests that followed, each with the glory round his brow, and, last of all, a figure more venerable and majestic than them all, clothed in the pontifical robes, with a mitre of light upon his head, who seemed performing the solemn ceremony of the Hallowing or Consecration; and Seward's heart stood still, as he recognised in those majestic features, and in the long beard that rested on his breast, the stranger he had ferried over the river but a short half-hour before. They paused before the door, and at different stations, whilst making the circuit of the church, and each time the walls were signed with the sign of the Cross, affixed there in blazing characters of light; and still the wonderful chant rose and fell at intervals, with words which, whilst he knew nothing of their meaning, clave to the memory of the listener with extraordinary distinctness. How long he gazed and listened he never knew; the ceremony was long, and had many changes; but his eye never felt tired of watching those figures, as they went to and fro with such a sweet order in all their movements: there was *such a joy and grace in the bowings of their heads, and*

the very foldings of their hands; they did not look weary or unwilling, as Seward felt he often was when he had been long standing at a church-function; but their service seemed all of love, and their singing was so full of gladness, that he thought they could have sung for ever; nay, what is more, if they had, he would have been well content to listen.

But an untoward accident put a sudden end to his enjoyment of the wonderful spectacle; for wholly rapt in its entrancing beauty, he ceased to look to his footing, and one of the stones on which he was resting, insecurely enough, giving way, he fell with a heavy crash to the ground; and looking about him, half stunned and wholly bewildered, he perceived that the lights in the minster were extinguished, and the music silenced. The ceremony seemed to be at an end; and now the only thing was to make the best of his way back to the boat, if, indeed, it were still there, and he were not, as he half doubted, bewitched, or spell-bound, or spirited away to some distant sphere. No; it was Thorney Island sure enough; there was the river gleaming in the light, now full and clear, of the September moon; and there were the dark heathen ruins black and drear as ever; and there, safe among the sedges on the shore, was his own flat-bottomed and clumsy boat; and Seward, as he looked about him on one familiar object after another, thought that, dull and sad as Thorney Isle had ever seemed, it had never looked so sad as now, when his eyes were still full of pictures of the heavenly worshipping. It was as though he had fallen down from the very courts of the Seraphim into a world of "beggary elements;" and though he would have been puzzled to express it, he felt like Endymion, after his midnight soaring on the eagle's pinions:—"the first touch of the earth went nigh to kill."

"It was surely a goodly vision," he thought; "but the bishop—he with the bright mitre and the snowy beard—I would give the best fish in the river to know *name*; and if it were not he I ferried over this very

night, may I never trust eyesight again, nor use it either. There was the very same ring in his voice too, as when he called my name, 'Seward! Seward!'—and how should he have known it, were he not something more than a common man, or even a king's noble, as I guessed in my dulness?"

"Seward! Seward!" sounded the same voice at that moment; and the startled fisherman hastily turned, and fell on his knees as he beheld the subject of his meditation standing on the shore before him. It seemed to him that he was not alone; a golden cloud floated about his feet; and, in the midst of its curling folds, he thought he could discern the beautiful faces, and the wings and aerial robes, of the angel choir; but all was misty and indistinct. "Holy Peter!" he exclaimed, and at the words the saintly visitant seemed to smile.

"Even so, good Seward!" he replied; "thou hast named me aright. Even now hath it been given to thine eyes, and thine alone, to see the hallowing of the first temple that shall bear that name in England; Heaven itself hath come down within its walls this night, and other hallowing must it never have from mortal hands. Wherefore do thou go to Mellitus, and tell him all things that thou hast seen, bidding him forbear to bring the words and rites of Holy Church where now they are not needed; and for thyself, fear not henceforth, either thou or thy comrades, to approach this spot; for the power of the Evil One is gone for ever; and Thorney Island from this hour is become the patrimony of Peter."

"Alas!" exclaimed the bewildered fisherman, "I am surely dreaming; or if I be in truth awake, and carry such a tale to Mellitus and the king, they will treat it as an ill-timed jest, and it may be my ears will pay the forfeit. What token shall I give them that should have power to stay them in their doings, or make them credit the word of a wretched fisherman when he tells them he is the messenger of an apostle?"

"O man of little faith!" was the reply; "still, as

in old time, is the cry for signs and tokens. Bid Melitus look upon the minster walls, and he will see the evidence of thy words; and if thou needest proof thyself that these things are real, and no sleeping phantasy, cast thy net on the right side of thy boat, and it shall be given thee; and know that neither thou nor thy posterity shall ever want for such so long as you fish not on the Lord's Day, and offer the tenth of all your gains to the church thou hast this night seen halloed by the ministry of angels."

Then as Seward still gazed upon the vision, he saw how it was lifted from the earth. The light golden cloud still encircled it, and bore it gently towards the heavens. The bright faces of the angels gleamed like stars about the figure of the apostle, and once more the harmonies burst from their lips, and filled the island with echoes of the same glorious music which had rung through the vaulted minster: "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Him flee before Him. Glorious things are spoken of thee, thou city of God. Alleluia! Alleluia! There shall be sung in thee songs of joy. Alleluia!" And as the vision floated higher and higher above his head, the Alleluias sounded fainter, and the golden cloud grew dim before his eyes. He passed his hand over them, as though to test his senses; and when he looked again, the dark island and broad rolling river were lonely and desolate as before.

It was long past midnight when Ebba caught the sound of her husband's foot on the path outside the cabin. Her terror at his prolonged absence had been excessive; and when Eadbald had returned with the news that the beacon-light had burnt itself out on the headland, and had produced no answering sound or signal from the boat, her worst fears of the Thorney goblins were confirmed. She hurriedly threw open the door, therefore, at the first sound of his footsteps, and *catching a brand from the fire, eagerly held it out to see whether indeed it could be he, as she scarcely dared*

to hope. It was indeed Seward, who entered bending under the weight of the nets that hung from his shoulders, and, as it seemed, were well filled with fish.

Her anxiety for his safety set at rest by the first glance, which assured her of his identity, the instinct of scolding instantly returned. "A fine fishing truly!" she began, "to keep folk watching and burning of lights till daybreak; and, as I warrant me, with nought to pay their trouble save a broken net. What hast thou there, that thou bearest thyself that gait?"

"Salmon," answered Seward, as he cast his nets upon the cabin floor; and displaying before her a sight such as, it may be supposed, had rarely been seen since the miraculous draught of Galilee, he selected from amongst the finny tribe one fish differing in kind, and of wondrous size. "Salmon; and it is the first caught in these waters, though, man and boy, I have fished in them forty years, and my father before me. Eels, and flounders, and sturgeons, and many other large and noble fish, have we sent to the royal table; but never until this night hath the salmon's fin been seen in Thames. It is surely Peter's own fish."

"And did you net it in the Thorney waters?" persisted his wife, whose delight at a capture so rare struggled with reluctance to yield her point, and an evident dread lest there should be witchery lurking in the salmon's scales. "Now, Our Lady grant you came of it as befits Christian man to do! for else it were worse than folly to set it before Mellitus. One sign from the holy man, good Seward, and if your fish be a goblin token, as I trow, there will be little left to dine on."

"O woman!" exclaimed Seward impatiently, "will you never have done with your witch tales and fooleries? You were used to boast that there was none could judge of fish like you; take this salmon in your hand, and see if it be not real, while I tell you who it was that sent it to my nets."

And as Ebba examined with professional accuracy

the fins and gullet of his prize, he told her in a few words the marvellous story of the night.

We must leave our readers to judge whether the power of his narrative or the beauty of the salmon had most effect in bringing conviction to the mind of Ebba. At any rate, her scruples at accepting the token so supernaturally given were overcome, and it was arranged that Seward should present himself before the bishop so soon as his train should arrive at Thorney on the following morning, in order to deliver the message with which he had been charged.

II.

It was truly a splendid sight that displayed itself within the walls and cloisters of the newly-erected abbey when the royal cortège of King Sebert, together with the whole body of ecclesiastics who were to take part in the ceremony of the day, assembled in their appointed ranks and order before entering the minster, whose doors were still fast closed. The fierce and half-savage bearing of the king's followers contrasted strangely with the aspect of the foreign ecclesiastics—missioners, all of them, from the refined and civilised south, sent to the barbarous shores of an island which Pope Gregory had described as being "in the corner of the world," that they might turn it to the faith by a renunciation of all things. They were mostly Romans by birth; and many a one was destined to leave his name in the calendar of the infant English Church among her apostles and her saints. Not a little of the magnificence of ecclesiastical pomp attended these Roman missioners; and such as it was, it at any rate struck the rude crowd assembled to behold it with feelings of awe and veneration; nay, the very look of those tonsured monks—the expression of their countenances telling at once of saintliness and of a higher civilisation—commanded the homage of their wild East Saxon converts; and many a

knee bent low with unaffected reverence to receive the blessing from the hand of Mellitus.

The procession was ready to advance, and the order to throw open the doors had already been given, when a movement was seen to disturb the crowd, and Seward the fisherman, pushing his way through the attendants, in spite of their best efforts to keep him back, cast himself at the bishop's feet in the very line of march. Many were the blows and hard names he had to endure in the execution of this manoeuvre; but he met them with that sturdiness of indifference which was wont so often to excite the impatience of the fiery men of Kent against their more phlegmatic neighbours the East Saxons. Spite of cuffs and kicks, and many a rough hand on his collar, Seward gained his point; but he would scarcely have held his position but for the kindly indulgence of Mellitus himself, who interfered in his behalf as some of the attendants in the king's train were endeavouring to drag him out of sight.

"Nay, I pray you, let the poor man speak," he said; "it is Seward the fisherman, an honest fellow, and a faithful son of Holy Church, though he has chosen a strange time for his petition. Speak, Seward," he added, "and say if there is aught in which I can befriend thee; though, in sooth, thou must say it briefly if thou wouldst not hinder the hallowing of St. Peter's Minster."

"Even for that am I come," replied the fisherman. "St. Peter's Minster hath been already hallowed, and needeth not prayers or rite of thine."

"Thou art over bold," said the bishop sternly, "and knowest not how to speak aright of holy things, when thou sayest that yonder minster, built on the very soil of paganism, needeth not Christian hallowing. Rite or words of ours indeed it needeth not; yet we trust that, by our poor ministry, the word of an Incarnate God will come down to do the work, and that His Blessed Spirit will not disdain to dwell therein at our unworthy bidding. Therefore, if thou hast no better or

weightier matter whereof to speak, see that thou disturb this holy ceremony no further by thy ill-timed foolery."

"Holy bishop," persisted Seward, "I am no jester, and have not wit enough to be a fool, did I desire it. I come but to say that which mine eyes have seen and my ears heard, and which the tongue of Blessed Peter hath itself declared to me and bidden me proclaim to your holiness and to the king's majesty. Yonder minster hath been hallowed, and by the Saint's own hands; and he bids you forbear to add words of Holy Church to that which is already made fast and sure in heaven. Even last night did I behold the sight and hear the psalmody which, if it beseemeth me to say so, passeth the singing of your holiness's choir; and that I was not dreaming, I have a token in the salmon which I caught at the Blessed Peter's bidding."

"Salmon in the Thames! Nay, if the holy fisherman gave thee such a token," exclaimed Sebert, who had joined the group that stood round Mellitus listening to the curious interruption of the day's proceedings, "I for one will not be slack to credit his word; for never have these waters yet given such fish to my table. What think you, reverend father, of the man's tidings? is he dreaming still? or hath there indeed been given some sign of heavenly favour on the minster we are offering to God?"

"I scarce know what to think," said Mellitus; "Seward is not a dreamer, nor a seer of marvels. Hast thou no surer token," he added, turning to the fisherman, "than the salmon in thy nets?"

"Holy father," replied Seward, "some such token surely awaits your holiness in the minster, though I know not of what manner it may be; only that he whom I saw last night bade me carry you these words, and tell you that the sign of their truth was on the minster-walls."

"Let us proceed thither," said Mellitus; "*the things of God's glory are oftentimes hid from the wise and prudent and revealed unto little ones, and it may*

be we are even now listening to a messenger of heaven in the person of this fisherman;" and so saying, he himself led the way to the minster-door.

It was opened as he drew near; and ere any foot was put upon its threshold, the bishop and his companions were sensible of an extraordinary and heavenly odour that issued from the interior of the edifice and filled them with wonder and curiosity. Whence did it proceed? for as yet there had been no holy rite that they knew of performed within its walls, and no censer had swung its sweet cloud of fragrance around the yet (as they thought) unconsecrated altar. But it was not incense, but rather the strange and balmy odour of the sacred chrism which filled the place; and Mellitus advancing alone, and with a feeling of more than usual reverence, into the church, approached the crosses on the walls which had been prepared for the ceremony of consecration. All doubts were removed at once; he beheld the pavement inscribed with the letters of both alphabets, the walls in thrice six places bedewed with the oil of sanctification, the remains of twelve wax-lights adhering to twelve crosses, and every part still moist with the recent aspersions.

"Thanks be to God for His great mercy!" ejaculated Mellitus; "no hand of ours shall touch these consecrated walls." Then kneeling before the altar, he added: "Confirm, O Lord, that which Thou hast wrought, and let not Thy name depart from Thy holy house, from this time forth, even for ever! This altar," he continued, "hath been hallowed for the Adorable Sacrifice, and we will offer It in thanksgiving to God this day; for other blessing than that of its Apostle is not needed by the holy minster of St. Peter."

The ceremony of consecration was therefore never performed, and the Mass sung by Mellitus was the only rite that celebrated the opening of the minster church. King Sebert, moreover, added to the rights of the new abbey that of the tenth of all the fish caught in the *Thames* within certain assigned limits,—a right which

is to be found existing in the muniments of the abbey down to the latest date. Nor was it until three centuries later, and after the minster of Thorney Island had suffered many sacrileges from the hands of the Danes, that the new church erected by the Confessor received consecration just before its founder's death: its erection was also undertaken and completed by the direct command of its glorious patron; for we read that St. Peter appeared in vision to the monk Wulsine as he slept, and declared his will to him, bidding him bear the same to the king.

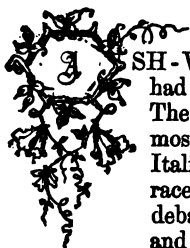
"There is a place of mine," he said, "in the western part of London, which I love, and which I formerly *consecrated with my own hands*, honoured with my presence, and made illustrious by my miracles: its name is Thorney; and having for the people's sins been given over to the barbarians, from rich it became poor, from stately low, and from honourable it hath been made to be despised. This let the king, giving command, restore, and make it a dwelling of monks; let him magnificently build it, and amply endow it; it shall be no less the house of God and the gate of heaven."

The obedience of St. Edward to this command is well known; and the church so built by him was finished and consecrated just in time to receive his relics and to be made his shrine.



IX.

THE MONK'S LAST WORDS.



SH-WEDNESDAY of the year 1649 had cast its holy sadness over Rome. The merriment of the carnival, that most charming and most childish of all Italian customs, which the northern races have darkened with scandals and debaucheries, had given place to prayer and fasting, and the solemn words, "*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es: et in pulverem reverteris.*" But at mid-day, in a large chamber overhanging the Tiber, five German artists might be seen sitting down to a jovial repast, which suited ill with the penitential day. The room in which they sat was one storey above the level of the river, which washed the foot of the house; three large windows opened upon the stream, now swollen and turbulent from the winter rains; and the artist to whom this apartment belonged could, without leaving his house, enjoy the quiet pleasure of angling.

Peter Van Laar, such was the artist's name, had resided in Rome for sixteen years: Poussin, Claude Lorraine, and Sandrart, were of the number of his friends: he was ill-made, even a little deformed; the length of his arms and legs gave him some resemblance to a monkey, and his whole face was covered by enormous moustaches, of which he was extremely proud, and which, curling up on each side of his nose, seemed to threaten the skies. His reputation, however, as an artist, his never-failing spirits, and a certain coarse good-humour which he possessed, made up in his companions' eyes for all his external defects.

These companions, on the day in question, were

Roelant and Claes Van Laar, his brothers, and John and Andrew Both, two celebrated painters of his own age: they were all disciples of Calvin. A little good sense and feeling might have taught them not openly to violate all the observances of the country which had so hospitably received them; and if they refused to own the authority of the Father of the Church, at least to obey the laws of the sovereign of Rome; and by these laws Ash-Wednesday is a day of abstinence. But they were used to follow their own ways unmolested, and the table was loaded with viands left from the feast of the day before, in the midst of which appeared triumphantly a splendid Tyrolean ham.

"Before we begin," said Andrew Both, "Peter shall play us a tune on his violin; a stirring tune, to wake us up a little and give us an appetite."

The rest eagerly backed his proposal, and Peter, who required no pressing, began with twisting his extraordinary figure and features into every kind of grimace to the tune of a burlesque dance, which was much applauded. At mid-day the five boon companions began their dinner with shouts of laughter, and a noise and confusion which predicted shattered glasses, if not a fray, before the end of the repast.

"We are really too bad to make such a noise," said Peter; "we must respect the customs of the country. What a stillness there is all around us!"

"Bah! nonsense!" answered Roelant; "we are not superstitious,—every one knows it; artists are privileged. Just fill my glass again!"

And the noise increased every instant. By four o'clock the five artists were all more or less intoxicated, and the chamber rang with the jingling of glasses and with their hoarse voices mingling in the most horrible curses, in impious jests and ribald songs.

It happened that a good Franciscan monk, passing the house, heard this hubbub; and fearing that a violent quarrel was going on, he hastened in to make peace. Directed by the noise, he approached the door,

opened it, and started back bewildered at the scene before him.

"Come in, father!" roared out John Both, insolently; "you look like a rare model. Come and take a draught;" and as the monk stood still, he pulled him roughly forward to the table.

"Gentlemen," said the monk gravely, "I thought I was coming among Christians; but I see I was mistaken."

"As much of Christians as yourself, old man!" answered Roelant, holding him back as he tried to leave the room; "and none the less, either, for eating a slice of ham."

"What nourishes the body kills not the soul," said John Both, in a tone of drunken solemnity.

"You are not quite in a state to reason, dear brothers," said the monk, gently; "but were you so, all I should say would be, when Mother Church commands, her children have only to obey. What is more worthless than a disobedient family, or a rebellious army? And besides, as you well know, it is not the food which we consider sinful, but the want of submission to lawful authority."

"The monk means to insult us," said Andrew, in a tone which was becoming sullen.

"No, my brethren, but I pity you; and on this holyday I beg you not to give this scandal. Remember that it is against the laws of the country; and that if, instead of me, any one in authority had seen you, you might have been imprisoned for a fortnight."

"He is right, he is quite right; let us leave the table," said Peter, in some alarm.

"No, no, that we will not!" cried Roelant; "though I am rather frightened, too," he added sarcastically, "if, as you say, he be right in what he says. Claes, bolt the door; John, hold the reverend father's feet."

"Who knows," suggested Andrew, "but we might be banished from Rome? We are Calvinists."

At these words a look of pain shot over the monk's

calm face, and he tried to escape; but he was held too firmly. "We will take care," said Claes, "that the monk does not betray us. Ah, I see how to manage that! Fill up the glasses, Roelant; we'll drink the good gentleman's health,—and, John, just cut him a slice of ham."

This suggestion was received with loud laughter and applause.

But over the gentle, simple face of the poor Franciscan came a wonderful dignity. With the hand which was free he declined the ham, which they tried to force upon him; and, when his persecutors had drunk his health, with every kind of mockery and insult, he said, "If you are indeed aliens from the Holy Roman Church, I can only pray for you and weep over you; I cannot blame you. But remember that I, her faithful son, think this which you would make me do a grievous sin."

"No matter! no matter! the greybeard shall do as we bid him," shrieked Roelant, thumping the table with his fist till all the glasses rang.

"He shall!" Claes rejoined; and he tried to force a morsel of ham through the closed teeth of the monk, who drew back in horror.

And then began a fearful scene—a scene which no pen can describe. Night was fast closing in; a stormy wind had arisen, and had burst open the window. The five artists looked in their rage and drunkenness more like demons than men; and the holy monk, the object of their satanic fury. Now held down in a chair, now pushed upon the tables, now knocked down, and then dragged up again almost stunned, yet firm in his resolve, he saw only furious eyes glaring at him, and heard nothing but curses, threats, and insults. Andrew Both held wine to his lips. Roelant tried to press the piece of meat upon him. Peter Van Laar, more sober, and uneasy at the wildness of his comrades, tried to persuade him to yield. Claes continued his endeavours to force open his mouth; the monk silently resisted, and

at every moment's pause, his-prayer rose up: "Dear Lord, deliver me, and pardon them!"

When this disgraceful scene had lasted for half-an-hour, Van Laar, the only reasonable one of the party, tried to restrain his companions. "This is too bad," he said; "let the poor wretch go, if he will first swear not to betray us."

"Impossible!" said Claes. "After all this, we are too much compromised: he may now accuse us of assault. No, no! he shall sin with us, or else he shall make acquaintance with our daggers."

He drew his weapon as he spoke; and all followed his example except Van Laar, who cried, "What, murder! know you not 'tis *murder* you are contemplating? Will you become assassins? You are ruining yourselves for ever!"

The daggers were arrested by this vehement address, and the monk was able to say: "Though you have left the Church, gentlemen, you still hold to the Bible. God sees you! and it is He who has said: 'Whosoever smites with the sword shall perish by the sword.'"

"He speaks truth!" exclaimed Van Laar, in an agony of remorse and fear. "Down with the poniards. I will have no murders or murderers in my house."

"The Tiber! yes, the Tiber!" cried Claes, whose drunken fury was unchecked; and, leaping on the window-seat, he dragged the poor Franciscan towards it.

"The monk will betray us!" said Andrew Both. "He will deliver us up to the Inquisition!" added John and Roelant; and thus, lashing themselves into a rage, they pulled and pushed their victim to the window.

"My God!—" began the holy man: but his dying prayer was drowned in the howling of the storm; and in another moment a heavy splash in the river beneath told that malice and impiety had done their worst.

Van Laar had taken no part in the crime, though *he had not moved a finger to prevent it. He leaned*

for some minutes from the window; but seeing only the black stormy night, he closed it hastily and turned to his companions, who had flung themselves on different seats, exhausted.

A long quarter of an hour elapsed in gloomy silence. Van Laar was the first to break it.

"What have you done!" he said.

Claes alone could find courage enough to answer.

"It is an untoward event, no doubt," said he; "but at least we have nothing now to fear."

"Nothing," rejoined Van Laar, "if the crime be not discovered!"

"The crime!" repeated the rest, looking on each other with a kind of terror; and they relapsed into their gloomy thoughts.

Moody and sad, the five artists went to their homes, thinking no longer of merriment or feasting. Instead of seeking each other out as before, they avoided each other with horror. Even when the Franciscan's body had been found, and they were certain that no suspicion was attached to them, nothing could banish the cloud from their brow; and Van Laar soon announced that business of importance obliged him to return to Germany. The others also declared that they too would leave Rome, which was now become hateful to them; and they all began preparing for departure.

"It is well, at least," said Van Laar, "that you did not dip your hands in his blood; for, remember, 'He who smiteth with the sword shall perish by the sword.' *He* said it, and the words of a dying man are terrible!"

"Bah!" said Claes, angrily; "superstition! tales to frighten children with! According to that, we ought all to be drowned."

He burst into a wild laugh: but it found no echo from his companions; their countenances only grew *more gloomy*, and they rose abruptly, saying, "*Do not talk of it: let us go—the sooner the better.*"

The next day the five friends dispersed. Claes Van Laar started for the villa of a Roman noble, who owed him a large sum for some pictures he had painted for him. He was riding on a mule, and in passing a bridge which joined two low rocks the mule slipped, and Claes was hurled into a torrent formed by the late violent rains. The body of his drowned brother was carried to Peter, who was packing up for his journey. After the funeral he set out for Holland, with his friend John Both.

Roelant Van Laar and Andrew Both had started in a fit of strange melancholy, the one for Genoa, the other for Venice. Neither of them was destined to see his native land again. Six months later, Peter Van Laar received the news that his brother had drowned himself at Genoa.

In the spring of the following year, John Both, when opening his studio at Utrecht, read in a packet received from Italy the account of his brother Andrew's accidental death by drowning at Venice.

Horror and remorse at the sight of this manifest judgment of God seemed to deprive the miserable man of his senses. Overwhelmed with agony and despair, he rushed out of his studio and through the streets like a maniac, and flung himself into the Rhine.

Of all the guilty associates, Peter Van Laar alone remained. He who had once been the gayest of the gay now dragged on a miserable existence, a burden to himself and to all around him; wasting in gloom and in vain brooding over the past the time which God seemed to allow him, as having been the least guilty, for repentance and amendment. But the long-suffering God does not always wait: He may continue standing at the door, and may knock again and again, and though as often unheeded, may as often repeat His calls; but there comes a moment when He lingeringly withdraws, and, albeit willing to return, returns no more. The sinner is left to his own weak will and the goadings of the evil spirit within him. And so it was

with this remorseful but unrepenting man, for on Ash-Wednesday, in the year 1673, his cook having served up a ham at dinner, Peter Van Laar sprang up with a cry of agony, rushed from the house, and drowned himself.

Truly the monk's last words had received a terrible fulfilment.

God's vengeance against murder has become a proverb among men; and at times He visibly punishes less heinous sins in this life, as though to vindicate even here His everlasting sovereignty, and to disclose to His creatures something of those tremendous judgments which are reserved for the impenitent in the world to come.



X.

THE MARTYR MAIDENS OF OSTEND:

A LEGEND OF THE 18TH CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

THE LISTENER.



CONSIDERABLY more than a hundred years have come and gone since one evening towards the end of May a young man, by his garb and general appearance adjudged to be an Englishman, or at all events a native of the British Isles, was observed to mingle with the motley crowd, which from every part of the city of Ostend was thronging onwards to the parish-church. It was the hour of Benediction; but no thought of prayer seemed to occupy his mind, for he paused occasionally to scan the passing groups with no incurious eye; and when he reached the church, instead of advancing towards the altar at which the service was to be performed, he ensconced himself in a dark corner near the entrance, where, free from every chance of observation, he could direct the same fierce scrutiny to those who entered as he had already bestowed upon the passers-by.

Some attracted more, some less of his notice; but each new face had power to call forth a look of eager questioning, which again as invariably faded away into one of disappointment; until the appearance of a fresh group at the very moment when service was commencing arrested all his attention, and evidently more than satisfied his previous expectations. The party in

question was composed solely of women, all young, and two at least most beautiful; the one with her fair hair, in contrast to the fantastic head-dress of the day, parted Madonna-wise upon her brow, the other veiling the "merry mischief" of her glance beneath the long dark lashes which swept her cheek like a silken fringe, as with eyes reverently cast down and features composed to an expression of intense devotion, she stepped sedately after her companions. The two fair girls who followed were far too young to call forth much speculation from any casual spectator, and the young woman who walked behind them, and who apparently occupied a position between a confidential servant and a humble friend, would have been absolutely plain, had it not been for a countenance which bore the unmistakable impression of a sweet and calm but most earnest mind.

None of them noticed the young Briton; and though it was plain that he had recognised them, it was just as evident that he did not wish the discovery to be mutual; for he drew quickly behind a friendly pillar as they passed, and it was not until they had taken their places near the altar that he ventured to seat himself at a little distance in the rear, from whence, his face being partially concealed by his hand and by a fold of his short mantle, he continued to watch them unobserved during the remainder of the service.

Though the taller of the two maidens who had first entered the church was visibly the chief object of his attention, yet was it in some degree shared by her dark-eyed companion, while the younger girls seemed to excite his interest only from their association with these two. But whatever might be his motive for this close observation, whether curiosity or admiration, or some yet stronger feeling, he was plainly not disposed speedily to abandon it; for even after Benediction was over, and the congregation had begun to retire, he still kept his eyes fixed upon the group with an air of stubborn determination, which sufficiently announced his intention of not leaving the spot until they had set him the

example. So far, however, from showing any immediate purpose of departure, the damsels remained quietly in their places until nearly the whole of the congregation had left the church; and then, after some little whispering and consultation among themselves, the Madonna-browed maiden rose and walked calmly towards the sacristy. The stranger bit his lips impatiently in apparent disappointment at this fresh delay, and made an involuntary movement forward, as if to follow her retreating steps; but again recollecting himself, seemed to submit with a kind of dogged resolution to his fate, while his unconscious tormentor proceeded with gentle and half-timid accents to inquire of one of the acolyths for the Père de Camba.

"What would you with the Père de Camba, my child?" asked an aged priest of a singularly benevolent aspect, who, having overheard her question, had stepped forward to answer it. "Or rather," he added, leading the way into the interior of the room, and closing the door, "rather, what would you have him to do for you; for I guess by your accent that you are a foreigner, and by your looks that you need advice? I am the Père de Camba, for whom you have inquired; tell me therefore if I can do aught to serve you."

"You can, mon père, if you will be so kind. I would learn of you whether an Englishman of the name of Elliot does not reside in this town, or at any rate at some short distance without its walls."

"Who are you that ask it, lady?" replied the priest, with something both of trouble and of curiosity in his manner.

"Sir," replied the maiden, "if indeed you be the Père de Camba, of whom in better times my good father was often wont to speak, you will know not only the secret place where at present he hides him from his foes, but likewise the writer of this letter, Master Richard Bishop, of Brailes House, Warwickshire, whom you once honoured by ranking him among your friends."

Père de Camba opened and glanced his eye over the

letter she presented ; and then, turning to the lady with an expression of double kindness in his good, kind face, he took her hand and said, " The daughter of the noble Elliot, and the great-niece of my good friend Richard Bishop, has indeed a twofold claim upon my love and service, to say nought of the reverence which I needs must feel for one whose family has given the first of a new line of orthodox prelates to that unhappy land of schism from whence she comes. Say, therefore, Mistress Winifride, in what can I assist you ? "

" I would fain see my father, sir ; for it is now two long years since he left England and me, his daughter ; banished, as I doubt not you already know, for his faithful adherence to the fortunes of a most unhappy monarch. "

" That will be easy of accomplishment, my child. Your father leads almost the life of a recluse in a cottage without the walls, and in Ostend he is known only as the holy hermit of England. When, therefore, would you wish to seek him ? "

" Oh, soon ! very soon, mon père ! Sunrise to-morrow, or indeed it scarcely seems too late to-night. I do so pine to see him, when I think how long, how very long it is since he has looked upon his child ! "

" Nevertheless to-night is much too late, " said the priest kindly but decidedly ; " and sunrise to-morrow would be much too early. Suppose we choose the happy medium, and name the hour of seven ? "

" Seven, then, let it be, " the maiden answered with a grateful smile. " Can you provide me with a guide, mon père ? "

" I know of one who cannot be far off, " he replied ; " for he generally remains until I leave the church, and if you will but wait a moment I will seek him for you ; " and opening the door of the sacristy as he spoke, the Père de Camba walked down the church, closely followed by the lady.

Her young countryman, who all this time had never quitted his post, was instantly moving in the same

direction. Then as they paused in conversation with one of the acolyths who had served at Benediction, concealing himself behind a pillar close to where they stood, he had the satisfaction of hearing, not only the name of the hotel at which the fair stranger was lodging, but likewise every particular of the directions which the unsuspecting curé gave the boy for her safe guidance the next morning to the residence of the English hermit without the walls. The intelligence, thus surreptitiously obtained, seemed to make an alteration in his plans. The lady was no longer the chief object of his attention, which was now transferred to her guide-elect; and no sooner did the latter quit the church than the stranger closely followed in his track. He took care, however, not to attempt any communication with him so long as they were within sight of the church; but after he had put two or three crowded thoroughfares between himself and all danger of observation from that quarter, he made a long stride forward, and tapping the boy upon the shoulder, inquired in a confidential tone if he could direct him to the cell of the English hermit. Happily for his schemes, this designation had been more than once repeated by the Père de Camba in his consultation with Winifride and her little guide; and the stranger was far too quick not to guess at the real condition of the person thus described, and to take advantage of the information he had gained.

"Yes, to be sure," replied the boy, completely taken off his guard by the friendly and easy tone in which he had been addressed; and then, connecting in his own mind the stranger who now accosted him with the party he had just left in the church, he added, "Monsieur may rest assured that the demoiselles will be as safe under my charge as if he had the happiness of being their conductor himself."

A slight faint smile played for an instant on the stranger's lip, as he thought perchance that he might *not be exactly* the guide the young ladies would have

chosen; but he repressed it ere it could have attracted his companion's notice, and merely remarked, with a slight inflection of virtuous indignation in his voice, "Demoiselles! I know not what demoiselles you speak of; but is it possible that ladies are permitted to visit the holy man? I should have thought so stern a recluse would have willingly dispensed with the company of such fair distractors."

"Ladies don't often visit him, certainly," replied the boy: "I never heard but of one before; and no one knew if she were really a woman, or only a man in woman's clothes. However, it is the Père de Camba who sends *my* demoiselles, so it must be all right; for he is the hermit's bosom-friend, and visits him once a-week, to confess him, some folks say, or to talk government matters with him, as others think; for the hermit is said to be fonder of the English king on our side of the water than of the great lady who queens it on the other; and the good father is much of the same way of thinking, as every one knows at Ostend."

"Quite right that he should be!" cried the stranger. "All honest men think the same. The hermit is a Jacobite, as we call them in England, and i'faith so am I, since at Ostend I can say it without danger of my head; wherefore lead on, *mon brave*, and look you say nought of this transaction to your demoiselles; for it must be a profound secret between the hermit and myself."

"Nay, but—" said the boy, pausing with some perplexity of manner—"it is surely a pity monsieur did not name his wishes to the Père de Camba; for the holy man is said not to be over fond of intrusion, and at this hour of night it is quite likely that a visitor to his cell may get a bullet instead of an embrace for his pains."

"Oh, is that all?" replied the young man laughing; "you need have no fears on that score, my good fellow, for the night is much too far advanced to think of beating up the old lion in his quarters; and, in fact, I

did not mean to visit him now, but merely to have a look at his den, in order to make mine own way thither at some future time. Take this gold piece, and lead on. The sum shall be doubled to-morrow if I find you have been faithful and true, and have kept my secret."

"*Bon Dieu*, how rich these Englishmen are!" exclaimed the boy, quite overcome by such unlooked-for munificence. "Come on then, monsieur, since you will have it so; but we must make haste, for we shall have barely time to go and return before the town-gates are shut for the night."

"Lead on," repeated the stranger; "and when we return you shall show me the way to the *Golden Fleece*."

"The *Golden Fleece*!" cried the boy in a tone of undisguisable amazement; "why that is the very same hotel where my demoiselles are staying."

"Indeed!" the stranger answered, with a well-feigned look of surprise; "I seem destined to cross their path to-night. However, the *Golden Fleece* will probably hold us all; or if not, I can seek accommodation elsewhere. So hasten on."

CHAPTER II.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

THE unconscious object of all these various manoeuvres was that evening sitting with the rest of her companions in one of the large empty-looking apartments of the *Golden Fleece*, when, unattended and unannounced, the stranger who had so closely dogged their footsteps entered, and took a seat, though all unbidden, at her side. The two youngest girls started up blushing deeply, partly from timidity and partly from surprise; and she of the dark eyes and raven locks might possibly have done the same, if a glance from her more guarded companion had not restored her to at least the sem-

blance of composure. A long and awkward pause ensued, during which the stranger seemed endeavouring to repress some emotion that unmanned him; nor was it broken until the maiden with the fair hair addressed him in tones that could scarcely be said to tremble, though a marble pallor had overspread both cheek and brow.

"My cousin Douglas, you are welcome; if, indeed (which I fain would hope), your visit be as well intended as assuredly it has been unexpected on our parts."

"And undesired, doubtless you would have me to understand; cruel, as you ever are, Winifride," replied he whom she addressed; while yet, in spite of the bitter look of disappointment on his features, he attempted to take her hand,—a movement which she dexterously evaded under the pretence of taking up her "knotting," the fashionable feminine amusement of the day. "And you, fair Elizabeth," he added, endeavouring to cover his repulse with an affectation of indifference, "are you also unkind and ungenerous as of old? and have you still neither heart nor hand to offer to your kinsman?"

"Neither heart nor hand, Master Douglas," the girl answered promptly, "unless, indeed,—though I do sorely doubt it,—that kinsman hath come back from his captivity a better man than when the fortune of war consigned him to a foreign prison."

"Good faith! you need doubt of it no longer, coz," the stranger answered with a voice and smile of bitter irony; "for if to be strong of will, and firm of purpose, and reckless of all consequences, constitute, as I take it, sterling worth, though in another sense to that which you religious hypocrites would set upon the term, then am I now to all intents and purposes a better man than even when I put thy grandfather's head in peril rather than relinquish one iota of my wishes."

"In troth, an it be as you say, Sir Cousin," replied *the lady*, striving to conceal an involuntary feeling of *terror and repulsion* beneath a light and laughing man-

ner, "David himself was not a truer son of Adam, when he set Uriah in the battle-front;—no, nor Solomon, when he bowed before a thousand idols to please the vanity of a thousand wives."

"Nay," retorted Douglas, "your wit is short of the mark, good mistress. With all his wisdom, Solomon was a fool; he risked perdition for the sake of many, while I would hazard it but for one, and that one is ——"

"Self," interrupted the spirited girl, her eyes flashing and her face kindling with irrepressible indignation.

"You are right; no other is, or could be worthy of such a sacrifice," replied Douglas coolly. "You have a keen judgment, Mistress Elizabeth."

"It needs no great wit to judge the present by the past," replied his cousin; "and of him who, even as a boy, sacrificed all things to his wayward passions, it surely may safely be predicted that self will still be the idol and the infatuation of his maturer years."

"Peace, Elizabeth!" interposed her graver companion; "such upbraidings are most unmeet a maiden's lips. Our cousin," she added, turning coldly but courteously towards their unbidden guest,—"our cousin is doubtless well aware that we have but even now concluded a long and wearisome journey; and therefore I trust he will hold us excused if, consulting our weakness rather than our politeness, we leave him to seek a much needed repose."

"His known tenderness and consideration for all human creatures leave no doubt but that he will consider this an indisputable and conclusive argument," said Elizabeth.

But again Winifride checked her. "It is not for us to bandy words, Elizabeth. Master Douglas, we pray you to permit us to retire."

"Not until you have heard me, Winifride; and that in private too," replied the young man, his face assuming that very look of relentless obstinacy of which he *had been boasting*.

Even Elizabeth felt her spirit quail before it, while Winifride, on the contrary, though she grew paler and paler, as was her wont, beneath the assumed calmness of her outward bearing, yet continued the conversation in the same tone of dignified composure with which she had commenced it.

"To what purpose, Master Douglas?" she said. "If it be but to discuss the question first mooted years ago, at the house of our venerable uncle, Master Bishop, such an interview would be as vexatious as impertinent; for I could but say what I have said before—and nothing more, and nothing less."

"Fie! Cousin Winifride," cried Elizabeth, "to be so mild! Now, an I were in your place, I would tell Master Douglas to his face, that if he were *then* an object of pity and indifference, *now* he is one of pity and aversion, nay, of the most profound contempt; and that not half so much for his unmanly persecution of a defenceless maiden as for his shameless backslidings in politics and religion; his forswearing the faith of his fathers for a hundred generations, and his mean adhesion to the upstart government of an undutiful daughter and a faithless sister."

"I thank you for that word, fair coz," Douglas broke in, with a look of malignant pleasure. "You have heard her, damsels all; and you cannot refuse to bear me witness, when I call upon you, that Mistress Elizabeth Bishop has committed herself to words of treason; yes, treason against the queen of the Protestant people of England, and against the Church of which that princess is the defender and supreme head."

"Not treason,—not treason," murmured the two youngest girls; and "not treason," boldly echoed Elizabeth herself. "For treason can be uttered only against the Lord's anointed; and him, thou knowest, I touched not in my discourse."

"Hush! my cousin," again Winifride interposed. "*Master Douglas*, once more, will it please you to *retire?*"

She moved towards the door as she spoke; but Douglas sprang forward, and drawing the ponderous wooden bar by which it was intended to be secured, exclaimed, with the addition of a terrible imprecation, "Not a living soul shall leave the room this night, Winifride, if you do not pass me your word for a private interview. Take your choice, brave damsels," he added, in a taunting tone; "yes or no, either will suit me indifferent well; for if I fail in speech with Mistress Winifride, I can at least find consolation in the fair company into which fate has flung me."

"And what if we will not endure it?" cried Elizabeth, the quick blood mounting to her neck and brow. "What, sir, if we choose to call others to our aid?"

"You may call," he answered, with a malicious smile, "but will any answer? Look at these thick walls and massive doors, and say if your very neighbours of the next floor could hear your cries, even if they were not (as they are) sleeping-off their deep potations of most vulgar schnaps?"

"Would you were fast in your prison still!" cried the vexed Elizabeth; "what ill fortune has sent you across our path once more, bad man?"

"Doubtless the gods, fair nymph, who would make us amends for our long captivity," he answered, with a mock air of odious gallantry. "I was even on my way to England when I received advice of your departure for these sandy shores; and on these sandy shores accordingly I have waited your arrival, winning meanwhile a reputation among the fair Ostendians which has made me the idol of every young frau, and the terror of every old one."

Winifride's very soul trembled within her as she listened to this audacious speech; but her resolution was taken on the instant, and she only said: "I will speak with you alone, Master Douglas, since you insist upon it; but only on condition that you give me your word of honour afterwards to retire."

"Word of honour!" echoed Elizabeth scornfully.

But Winifride checked her with a look, as she continued: "You, dear Elizabeth, will withdraw into the next chamber with our young friends: and Hilliard shall remain with me; but out of ear-shot of what may be spoken."

"That is not a bargain," cried Douglas indignantly; "I said alone, and with no other witness than—"

"God and our own conscience," said the maiden calmly. "Master Douglas, I fear you not; but I speak to no man save in the presence of a third person: and for the rest, Hilliard is my second self, and a secret of mine is as sacred in her hands as if it were her own."

Douglas at first seemed about fiercely to refuse this compromise; but something there was upon Winifride's brow which warned him that if he rejected these conditions he might fail of his point altogether, therefore he sullenly signified his assent by withdrawing the wooden bolt from the door, and so leaving the rest of the party free to depart. This the two youngest girls did in a hurried and terrified manner; but not so Elizabeth, who paused on the threshold to give him a look of defiance, which he, to do him no more than justice, retorted to the full.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW.

"JESU! Maria!" cried one of the girls, as they all crowded into the next apartment, like a flock of frightened lambs. "May God protect our dear Mistress Winifride! Saw ye the scowl this fierce stranger cast upon her as we left her alone with him?"

"Nay, little Annie," said Elizabeth, laughing, "that scowl was intended for me; only Winifride being half a head taller, it fell instead upon the brow of the only woman who has calmness and dignity enough to quell *the spirit of that insolent Scotchman.*"

"*Then he is not English,* dear Mistress Elizabeth;

I am truly glad of it, for I should have been ashamed of my countryman."

"No, Annie; his mother, indeed, was the sister of my mother, and of Winifride's as well; but she married a Douglas, and so the blood of one of the oldest and noblest families of Scotland is tingling in his veins."

"Good lack! and yet he did act the evil part you have hinted at just now," cried the girl, in unfeigned astonishment.

"He did all that I have said, and with more villany even than I have yet described," answered Elizabeth, compressing her beautiful lips to an expression of utter scorn. "He wanted to wed Winifride; and when he found that, her heart being set upon a convent, she would by no means consent to be his wife, then was he wicked and mean enough to seek by force to extort her acquiescence."

"Nay, and indeed!" the girl responded under her breath from very fear; "and what did he, dear Mistress Elizabeth? Did he waylay her on the road-side, and bear her to some old deserted castle, as is told of the heroine of an old romaunt which used to lie in a closet near my late mother's chamber?"

"And which little Annie Scandret used to read and believe as devoutly as if it were the Bible from whence her father was wont to find texts for his discourses," said Elizabeth, who in the midst of her anxiety and vexation could not refrain from smiling. "No, indeed, my own Annie; and lucky for Winifride it was that he did not, seeing that I know not in all the country round about Brailes House of any courteous knight who (as is needful in all such fair distresses) would have ridden to the rescue. Master Douglas had a much more prosaic, and, alas that I must say it, a much more fatal method by which he sought to accomplish his end. He renounced his faith, gave in his adhesion to the usurping government of Anne; and having thus secured the patronage and confidence of its members, he threatened to denounce Winifride's father as an intriguing Jacobite,

—ay, and he afterwards put his threat into execution, and forced him to fly the country, while at the same time he nearly brought mine own old grandsire to the block by his treacherous revelations of the plottings of Brailes House; revelations of which he, in sooth, was a fitting witness, who had been nursed and cherished as one of its own sons from the very hour when at his birth he was bereft of his mother.”

“And how did Mistress Winifride escape the snare?” the girl asked again, with all the breathless interest which such a story was calculated to excite in one of her age.

“By the strong will and true heart of woman,” said Elizabeth with enthusiasm; “she would not have him on any terms. There had been no pitiful trifling with his vanity or his affections. He had never had her love, but now he had forfeited her esteem; and this she told him kindly, I doubt not, yet simply and resolutely;—so resolutely, that in the first agony of his disappointment he joined the army of the Duke of Marlborough, then gathering laurels on the fields of Flanders.”

“And Mistress Winifride would not have him after all?” said the elder of the two girls, who had hitherto been listening in silence. “And yet,” she added with much *naïveté*, “he must have loved her very much.”

“He loved her, Catherine: she had a fair face and a goodly fortune,” said Elizabeth, almost bitterly. But never you trust an affection which can trample on the laws of God and man for the attainment of its object. As I have said, Master Douglas joined the army, and was taken prisoner in his very first battle; and a prisoner he remained, until we were beginning to hope we had lost sight of him for ever; when lo! here he is again in this old out-of-the way town of Ostend,—for our sins, it must be supposed, since assuredly it is not for his virtues. But hark! what noise is that?”

They listened anxiously. The voice of Douglas was at first distinctly audible; then the soft accents of Wi-

nifride seemed venturing a reply; and then Douglas louder and louder still, until Hilliard could be heard interposing between them.

"Nay," said Elizabeth anxiously, after a moment's attentive listening, "Winifride must be hard pressed indeed if Hilliard is coming to the rescue. She who speaks so seldom, excepting to God and our Lady, would scarcely venture to break a lance with Master Douglas unless the case were urgent. But hush! he is at it again."

"And, Christ save us, what an oath!" cried Catherine Jeffs, involuntarily crossing herself.

The next moment the door of the other apartment was suddenly flung open, and Winifride's voice was heard in loud and energetic tones. "Leave me, Master Douglas; leave me! Not for my own life, nor for the lives of the nearest and dearest of my kindred, would I hearken for another moment to such words as these. Pass on!" she continued, in a manner so commanding, that involuntarily the young man obeyed; and when the girls rushed upon the landing-place, they found him standing in the open doorway, but with the hand of Winifride so firmly clasped in his own as effectually to prevent her from withdrawing it.

Quick as lightning Elizabeth saw her advantage, and started up the next flight of stairs, exclaiming, "It is intolerable! Look you, Master Douglas, I will rouse up the people of the next floor, and we shall see if you dare to carry yourself as boldly before men as before women and young girls."

Douglas perceived at a glance that she could fulfil her threat long before he should be able to prevent her, so he thought it best to avoid exposure by dropping Winifride's hand and preparing for departure. Yet, ere he did so, he could not refrain from saying, in a suppressed rage, "I go, Winifride; as *you* will it, have it so: but we meet again notwithstanding."

"It will be on the other side of the grave, then," said his cousin, with calm dignity; "for in this world I *do swear most solemnly* never willingly to give you

opportunity of insulting me again, as you have done this night. Farewell, then—and for ever.”

“Farewell; but only till to-morrow,” thought Douglas, as he descended the stairs, smiling with malicious pleasure, to think how easily he should be enabled to try her constancy in her coming interview with the recluse, who, well he guessed, would prove to be her father.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RECLUSE.

NOTWITHSTANDING the restless and disturbed night which was the natural consequence of the distressing visit we have just been describing, both Winifride and her faithful Hilliard were quite ready the next morning, when the little attendant assigned them by the Père de Camba made his appearance at the *Golden Fleece*; and under his experienced guidance they had soon left the gates of the city far behind them, and were walking along the fine sea-promenade called the *Levée*, which chanced to lead directly towards the hermit's dwelling.

This in appearance was nothing better than a hut; but a little garden had been neatly laid out in front, while in the rear it was sheltered by some low stunted bushes; and among them, it is almost needless to observe, Douglas had securely concealed himself long before the moment when Winifride and her companion tapped at the door of the cabin, and the former was received into the arms of her delighted father. The arch traitor had very cleverly taken up his position just under the open window of the only room of which the house could boast; and there, from behind his leafy screen, he could not only see his cousin folded in her father's arms, and shedding tears of joy upon his bosom, *but also distinctly* hear the exclamations of affection *and delight* which each in turn was addressing to the

other. The envy and despair that tortured his soul might haply resemble that which filled the serpent as he gazed upon the joys of paradise: but, like the serpent, Douglas also was plotting his revenge; and therefore he repressed the heavings of his angry bosom, and put back the curse upspringing to his lip, and prepared quietly to listen, and carefully to gather up such materials from the conversation as might enable him, since he could not hope to make her falter in her duty, to work at least her temporal destruction.

Elliot was the first to speak. "My child, my child," he murmured, as he looked fondly on the fair face of his daughter, after having cast aside with his own hands the mantilla, which, being the ordinary dress of the maidens of Ostend, she had substituted, in obedience to a hint from the Père de Camba, for her more English-looking head-gear, "for how many months, for how many years, have I not thirsted for this moment! And yet now I find you only, as it seems to me, to lose you!" he added, laying his hand on her head with a gesture of inexpressible fondness and regret.

"Nay, my father, speak not thus! We cannot be said to lose that which is freely given to our God; and again, has it not been said by Him, that He will repay an hundredfold whatever we sacrifice for Him?"

"He hath said so, in good sooth," replied her father, with a sigh; "and since He Himself has said it, we must, even as becomes us, try to feel as well as to believe it. Nor think, my own beloved child, that I am less than grateful for that religious calling which doubtless rendered you from the first indifferent to the wooings of your cousin Douglas, who has since proved himself unworthy both of the noble house from whence he is descended and of you."

"My father," cried Winifride, shrinking, as if his words had recalled an evil vision to her mind, "*he whom you have named is at this moment in Ostend, and he visited me last night.*"

"Ha! I trust he rendered you that due courtesy which, as a modest maiden, you had a right to look for at his hands, and that surely none the less so as the daughter of his mother's sister."

Winifride paused a moment to reflect. She felt it would be but adding uselessly to her father's sorrows, if he were made acquainted with the insolent conduct of her cousin, and so she only answered, "He renewed somewhat of the old talk of marriage; but I forbade him both that theme and my presence, and so we hope to be molested by him no more."

Could Winifride have seen the face, or looked into the secret soul of George Douglas, as he crouched that moment beneath the open window, drinking in her every word, as food alike for hatred and for love, she would have felt more than ever confirmed in her own strong conviction (which, however, she did not impart to her father,) that his pursuit of her would never cease until it had left her in her grave.

"No more, indeed," said Elliot anxiously, taking up her last words; "we must hope, dear child, that he will not again force himself upon you. And yet his very presence in these parts fills me with apprehension. Perchance you are not aware that he has been released from prison on a secret understanding with the Court of St. Germain's, and for the express purpose of promoting our interests among the Jacobites of England; therefore it bodes no good to us, or to the king, that he should be lingering on here in Ostend, when there is so much to do, and which he has promised should be done, elsewhere."

"His language to us was very unlike that of a friend to the king," answered Winifride. "Is it not dangerous, think you, to trust him?"

"Trust him I cannot say I do; and yet, I think, were he a traitor, he would hardly have revealed his baseness to you. Perchance he left you wittingly in ignorance of his change."

Winifride made no reply. She deemed her cousin's

words but an angry threat; and thus, although she entirely distrusted his integrity, she did not wish needlessly, perhaps, to alarm her father. Elliot, finding she continued silent, of his own accord changed the subject to a less anxious theme.

"But you say *us*, my Winifride, and therefore I must conclude that your gay cousin has really cheated the world by persisting in her resolve to share your cloister. Impetuous and ardent as she is by nature, it must indeed have been a sacrifice to make!"

"And for that very reason she will make it bravely," cried Winifride, with a beautiful enthusiasm for her sister-cousin. "Until the very last moment no one would believe it. Friends saw her faults, but not her virtues; they knew that her feelings were ardent and passionate, and her nature somewhat lofty; but they could not see that out of these very dispositions grew that intenser spirit of devotion which counts all as nothing when given to its God!"

"It is the very stuff of which saints are often made," replied Elliot smiling. "And Hilliard is with you all?"

"My faithful Hilliard! yes, the pain of that parting has been spared me; and as we have grown together from the cradle, and from the cradle have ever thought, and felt, and prayed together (though, in sooth, her fervent piety did use to put my negligence to shame), so now the same convent will receive us both, and in our death we shall not be divided. But there are yet two other damsels of our party;—Anne Scandret, the young daughter of that Scandret, a preacher of the Anglican sect, who, you may remember, was some time since received into the Church, and another girl, the child of one Thomas Jeffs, a good man and a Catholic, as well as an earnest upholder of the exiled king. Master Scandret was anxious that his daughter should reside for a short space in a religious house, to be more deeply grounded in the mysteries of our holy faith; and he and the man Jeffs so earnestly besought me to take

charge of these poor children, that without manifest discourtesy and uncharitableness I could not say them nay. Albeit, I will own I was somewhat unwilling at the first, seeing that the travelling with so large a party tended to embarrass my movements and to draw the attention of government upon us."

"Thou hast done well and kindly, as thou hast ever done, my Winifride," replied her father fondly. "And what of thy great-uncle, the good Master Bishop?"

"He is well, my father, though much oppressed by the ill turn which his majesty's affairs do ever seem to take, however well and prosperously they may have shown in the commencement. But, I bethink me, I have a packet for you which will tell you more at large of his proceedings than our brief interview will permit my doing."

"The good old man!" said Elliot, with a sigh, as he laid the packet on the table, "it grieves me that he should be so despondent; and all the more so, for that I myself have still good hopes that the cause for which we struggle will finally prove triumphant. And now, child of my inmost heart, I fear me I must dismiss thee; for the sun is climbing high in the heavens, and it will not do to let it get abroad that the old hermit entertains ladies in his lonely cell. But where is the good Hilliard? I would exchange a word of greeting with her ere you depart."

Elliot rose, and drawing his daughter's arm tenderly within his own, proceeded to the door, where Hilliard was awaiting them. Douglas seized the opportunity to get a better view of the apartment than he had hitherto been able to obtain. The packet brought by Winifride was lying on the table near the window, within his very reach. No scruple restrained him; his hand was eagerly put forth to seize it, and the next moment the letter was hidden in his bosom, and he himself on his way back to Ostend, long before Elliot had given his last embrace and blessing to his daughter.

CHAPTER V.

THE STOLEN PACKET.

WINIFRIDE and her companion were so absorbed in their own reflections as they returned towards the town, that they saw nothing of Douglas; although as soon as he thought himself safe from discovery, he had partially retraced his footsteps in order to follow upon theirs. Happily their little guide was not so unobservant; he had employed himself during Winifride's long interview with her father in making sundry observations in the hut and garden of the latter, and the result was the discovery of Master Douglas ensconced among the bushes. The boy, as it happened, had already begun sorely to repent of his imprudence in making the suspicious-looking Englishman acquainted with his countryman's retreat; and now, nothing doubting that some mischief was intended, he felt greatly puzzled how to act in order to prevent it. The fair foreigner, who had won his heart by the gentle kindness of her voice and manner, would, he felt instinctively, be powerless in the matter; Père de Camba, to say the truth, he feared to acquaint with his own act of folly; so at length he came to the resolution (the wisest under the circumstances that he could have adopted) of returning at once to the hermit himself, and revealing his anxiety as to the intentions of the intruder. No sooner, accordingly, had he reconducted his charge to the gates of Ostend, than he once more turned his steps towards Elliot's dwelling; and when, some hours afterwards, the Burgomaster sent his officials to the spot, they found, as the result of this interview, not only that the exile had himself thought fit to disappear, but that he had likewise either taken with him, or destroyed, all that the hut contained which could have thrown light on his identity or occupations.

After the departure of her young guide, Douglas hesitated no longer; but striding at once up to his cousin, he caught her by the arm in such a way as to make it impossible for her to free herself without attracting observation; and "Winifride!" he said, in that deep low voice which Elizabeth had been wont to say was always the token of his worst and most relentless moods,—"Winifride! you were very brave last night; now let us see if you can stand the test: your life, and—what I believe is infinitely more precious in your eyes—the lives of those who are nearest and dearest to you—your uncle, yes, and your father too, are in my power. Now say, will you bid me depart or not?"

"You have played the listener, Master Douglas," replied his cousin, with far less of surprise than of grave contempt in her manner; "the man capable of such an action can be trusted neither as friend nor foe; and therefore to accept of any terms from him, would be but to lose in dignity without gaining aught in real security or repose."

"Winifride, hear me," Douglas continued with frightful earnestness, which made his fiend-like threats sound still more terrible, "those were no vain words I uttered last night, as perchance you may have deemed them. I told you then—and now you must perforce believe it—that no idle consideration of honour or of conscience has power to turn me from my purpose, no matter whither it may lead me, or what misery it may bring down on others: with you at least I will be candid; nor will I insult your understanding by any affectation of the sanctity which your smooth-faced hypocrites assume; rebel or royalist—saint or sinner—either or all am I, just as I think it may make or mar my fortunes. Now you know all; and you will understand that I am in earnest when I say, that if you will love me and will wed me, I will save your kinsmen, and will join their party; but if you will not, why then you may live to sing their requiem, or you may perish with them; but in either case I shall have been revenged."

"Love!" repeated Winifride bitterly; "love in the face of such deeds and sentiments as these! And after all, who are you, that you talk so loudly? or what authority do you possess, that the safety of a whole race is to depend upon your fiat?"

"I am but George Douglas, to be sure," replied the traitor with a sneer; "but then, am I not also an accredited agent from the Court of St. Germain's? and as such, would not your father and your uncle be in my power, even if I had not possession of such a document as this?" and he held significantly before her eyes the very packet which but an hour before she had confided to her father.

"You could not, you would not be so base!" the poor girl gasped, struck to the heart by the probable consequences of such treachery. "I will say nothing to you of my father; but you could not act so foul a part by Master Bishop,—the good, the kind old man,—he whose house was so often the home of your boyhood, and whose heart was ever open to you as if you had been his own."

"I could, and I would," replied her cousin with his most determined manner. "I could, I would, and what's more, I will, and that too on the instant, unless by a written document you promise to renounce the mummery of a religious state, and to return forthwith to England as my wife."

"That will I never do!" cried Winifride vehemently. "You may, if you please, prove a traitor alike to God and to your kindred; but me you shall never compel to the baseness you propose. So help me God and our Blessed Lady!"

"Amen!" responded the impious mocker; "and yet it seems to me, fair would-be martyr of this enlightened age, that your oath is somewhat rash; for say you keep it on the one side, then it must perforce be broken on the other. For instance; adherence to your God, by which I believe you would poetically express *your mad folly in making a monkish woman of your-*

self, will inevitably involve you in the much deprecated act of high treason to your kindred, since I swear to you—and my oath, to say the least of it, may be counted as irrevocable as your own—I swear, that if you relent not, the vessel that sails this night shall bear such intelligence to England as will suffice to send your uncle, with every mother's son who calls him cousin, to the block, ere another month has passed over their heads!"

There was a pause, for Winifride was too much agitated to trust her voice; and Douglas, mistaking her silence for hesitation, thus proceeded: "We are close to your abode, and I give you half an hour to deliberate with your friends. Possibly Elizabeth Bishop may not be so heroically inclined as knowingly to condemn her aged grandsire to destruction. At all events, it will be but courteous to offer her the option; so in half an hour I shall be here for your decision. Meanwhile, I think I need not warn you that any attempt at escape will but precipitate the ruin of your friends."

"You need fear nothing on that head," replied Winifride haughtily, "since all too keenly do I feel already that each of those lives so cruelly imperilled by your treachery is worth more than a thousand and a thousand of mine own."

They had reached the archway of the *Golden Fleece* as she finished speaking. Douglas bowed her in with as much formality as if his had been merely an escort of politeness; and then, setting his back doggedly against the wall, he prepared to await her decision with an outward semblance of tranquillity which was terribly contradicted by the wild workings of the heart within.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DECISION.

"Good heavens, Winifride! what is the matter? and what has happened?" cried Elizabeth Bishop and both her young companions, as Winifride, pale as death, and Hilliard, scarce less ghastly, stood before them.

"Oh, Elizabeth! I have undone you!" cried the unhappy girl, sinking into a chair, and covering her face with her hands.

"Nay, not quite so bad as that neither," interposed the kind voice of Hilliard; "it was but an unlucky accident, for which no one can with any show of justice be censured or reproached."

"But what is it? what has happened?" asked the perplexed Elizabeth.

"The packet! the packet!" murmured Winifride. "My God! how or when could he have obtained it?"

"You surely do not mean to say that Douglas has found means to possess himself of that packet which my grandfather intrusted to the care of Winifride?" cried Elizabeth, addressing Hilliard.

"Unhappily it is even so," she answered. "By foul means or by fair ones, Master Douglas is in possession of that very packet."

"Nay, but it is impossible," ejaculated Elizabeth, now white as ashes in her turn; "you must be mistaken, Winifride. How should you know it from any other paper?"

"By the acorn which you yourself did paint in frolic on the cover, Bessy."

"Then God have mercy on his soul!" cried Elizabeth, utterly aghast at this intelligence. "God have mercy on his soul; for the old man is lost!"

"Not for certain," whispered Winifride; "he will restore the papers, so that I consent to be his wife."

Elizabeth rose from her chair, struggling with emotions that all but choked her; and then catching Winifride by both her hands, exclaimed, "Now, Winifride, I swear to you that, if even for the sake of that dear old man, or for the sake of any human being whatsoever, you are capable of faltering in your noble purpose, or of giving one syllable of encouragement to that bold bad man, Elizabeth Bishop will be your friend no longer."

"Noble Elizabeth!" cried Winifride, folding her friend in her fast embrace; "such well I knew would be your answer. And yet, and yet I did also fear me that you could not choose but hate one who was the cause, albeit unwilling, of your grandfather's ruin."

"There, indeed, you did me wrong," said Elizabeth affectionately. "But where is this traitor Scotsman? Shall we not give him his answer on the instant?"

"I will write it," said Winifride; "thus shall we spare ourselves his hateful presence;" and drawing a sheet of paper towards her, she wrote, in a hand if possible bolder and firmer than ever was her wont:

"Work your wicked will upon us; for I never can and never will be yours.

"WINIFRIDE."

Hilliard took the paper and carried it to Douglas. He gave one glance at its contents; and then, tearing it up with a rage so concentrated as almost to resemble calmness, took his way towards the residence of the burgomaster of Ostend.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

MONTHS of uncertainty passed away, during which the young Englishwomen were placed under the *surveillance* of the chief magistrate of the town, who, although *reluctant to undertake the ungracious office*, had not

ventured to refuse, after George Douglas had represented to him that his cousins were suspected in England of being engaged in aiding and abetting some of the numerous plots for the restoration of the elder line of Stuart which were every where rife at that period. Through the kindness of the Père de Camba, Winifride had in the course of this time the happiness of hearing of the safe arrival of her father at the Court of St. Germain, whither he had repaired after flying from Ostend; but concerning the fate of her English relations both she and her cousin were compelled to remain in a most cruel state of uncertainty, George Douglas and his agents so closely watching their proceedings, that every attempt at communication with their own country was effectually prevented.

In the midst of all this trouble and perplexity, the poor girls found their only support in the consolations of religion. Few hours of the day there were in which one or other of them might not have been seen kneeling in the church; and there, as in all other places, their devout and modest demeanour secured them the respect and sympathy of the inhabitants of Ostend. Their history (which had got abroad), their vocation to religion, and their fidelity to their holy calling, had well-nigh invested these young girls with the character of martyrs; while the treachery of George Douglas was regarded with proportionate detestation and horror.

It was not until the close of a most stormy autumn that their doom was finally decided, by the arrival of a queen's messenger with orders to compel them to return immediately to England. A note from George Douglas first acquainted them with this fact, as well as with the arrest of Master Bishop, and many of his family, on a charge of treasonable correspondence with the Court of St. Germain; and he took care to couple this information with a hint, that any attempt on their part to evade or delay their own portion of the sentence would only increase the danger to which their friends were already exposed. His victims, however, needed not this sugges-

tion ; for, in fact, they had no idea either of evasion or of resistance. The night before their intended departure was spent by Hilliard in the church, kneeling, as was oft her wont, for hours before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. Her young companions joined her at sunrise ; and after they had assisted at the Divine Sacrifice, and received Holy Communion from the hands of their faithful friend, the Père de Camba, they proceeded at once to the place of embarkation, accompanied by that good old man, as well as by vast numbers of the townspeople, who, although personally unknown to the maidens, had yet warmly felt, and openly resented, the unmanly persecution they had undergone at the hands of their countryman and kinsman.

The wind was howling portentously, and the aspect of the heavens threatened a speedy repetition of the terrible storms which already (more than once this season) had strewn the shore with the tokens of shipwreck and of death. But the lives of those who were dearest to them were dependent on their prompt return, and it never even occurred to them to delay it for any chance of danger to themselves.

George Douglas was on the spot to witness their departure ; but whether from some late feeling of compunction, or from an eager desire to see his plotting crowned with success, perhaps he himself could scarcely have defined. Probably, however, the former and the better motive was that which influenced him ; for as Winifride was passing, he put forth his hand, exclaiming, "Winifride, can you forgive me?"

"I can and do," she answered gravely and kindly, but without appearing to see his outstretched hand ; and having thus tacitly refused his proffered aid, she stepped into the boat unassisted, and added, "Douglas, farewell !" and "farewell for ever !"

Not so Elizabeth Bishop, who was following close upon her footsteps ; for she paused with one foot already on the edge of the boat, and held out her hand to Douglas, saying, as he took it, "Douglas, I have never loved

you, and you know it well. But now we may never meet again; and therefore I pray you pardon me whatever of idle or unkind I have ever spoken against you, as I do pardon from mine inmost soul the evil dealing which has brought us hither."

"And wherefore should we never meet again?" demanded Douglas in a husky voice, more moved than he chose to own by this unlooked-for mood of softness in this high-spirited girl, who had always hitherto opposed him with a tenacity of purpose equal to his own.

"Because we shall neither reach England, nor return hither alive," said a voice behind him. It was Hilliard who had spoken.

With a feeling as if he had listened to a prophecy, Douglas gazed upon her pale inspired brow; the next moment she and her young companions had passed like a vision from before his eyes; and long ere he had recovered from the shock of almost superstitious awe which her words had caused him, the boat was shoved off from shore amidst the prayers and lamentations of the spectators on the beach.

Higher and higher rose the wind that day, and darker and darker rolled the billows. Ships came hastily in for shelter, and anticipations of coming sorrow were beginning to weigh heavily on the hearts of those who had friends at sea, when word all at once went through the town that the brig conveying the English damsels was in imminent danger of shipwreck. For an hour or two she had indeed struggled bravely with the surging billows; but the tide was running high, and, with a heavy sea and wind against her, the overladen vessel at length became unmanageable, was driven back upon the land, and struck upon the western head of the harbour, close to where Douglas was watching her from the shore. Crowds of people rushed on the instant to the spot, the gates were opened, and every effort was made to save her; but no boat could

have gone to the rescue and hoped to live in those tumultuous waters; and as they watched her beating fearfully against the palisades, the most experienced seamen shook their heads and prophesied her doom.

It was a terrible sight to see, and rendered yet more terrible by the fact of the imperilled vessel being so close in shore that the shrieks and lamentations of the passengers could be heard high over the bellowing of the wind and the roaring of the waves; and once even Douglas saw, or thought he saw—and the very thought almost deprived him of his senses—the white robes of Winifride fluttering in the storm. It was but for a moment; the next the vessel foundered and went down—went down at a stone's throw from the land, and while they who perished in her were still within sight and hearing of the friends they had left but a few hours before—within sight and hearing, irrevocably divided, and yet so near that a hand or an arm put forth in pity must almost have seemed to their agonised senses sufficient for their rescue! Douglas heard the cry of agony which went up in that terrible moment from sea to sky; a rushing sound then filled his ears, a mist came over his eyes, and he covered his face with both his hands, for he felt—rather than could be said to know it—that all indeed was over.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMORSE AND REPENTANCE.

Two days afterwards the bodies of the martyr maidens were discovered washed up among those of other victims on the beach. The venerable Père de Camba attended in person the procession that bore their remains to the church where they were to be buried. Thirty young *girls*, carrying lighted tapers in their hands, walked by *the bier* on which they were sleeping side by side, while *the entire* population of Ostend followed reverentially in

the rear. It was arranged that the funeral should take place after early Mass next morning ; and in the mean time the crowd continued to flock in and out, to pray, it might be, for the souls of the departed, but yet more to gaze with reverence on the dead—the dead for conscience' sake. Douglas also, pale and as one spell-bound, lingered through the hours of the weary day around and about, and every where but in the church. He longed to enter, but he did not dare ; dreading alike the angry glance of the living people, and the yet more terrible reproach which would meet him in the countenances of the unconscious dead. The veil had fallen from his eyes, the passions that had urged him on were extinct or stifled, and remorse—God's most fearful retribution, and yet His highest act of mercy to the sinner—was already gnawing at his heart.

As night closed in, and the crowd began to disperse, he approached nearer to the church ; drawn hither, so it seemed to him, by some invisible hand which he had no power to resist. Nearer and nearer still he came, until at length he almost fainted on the threshold, so strongly did the recollection of the night on which he had stood there to watch for Winifride rush into his mind. It passed in a moment, the sharpness of that pang of agony and self-reproach ; and then he staggered up the aisle, until he stood before the bier where the early dead were laid together. There he counted his victims one by one, and lingered long upon each ashy face ; until at length, unwillingly, and as if because he could not help it, he sought that of Winifride, and his very soul seemed to die away within him as he gazed upon her features.

Neither she nor the young girls who lay cold and still beside her, bore any traces of the death-strife on their persons. Some kind motherly hand had wrapped their forms in snowy drapery, and wiped the sea-foam from their shining tresses ; and there she lay, the idol and the victim of the strong passions of his soul,—there she lay, calm, and pale, and holy—calmer, and paler,

and holier still for the shadows of death beneath which she slumbered. The lovely hands were folded in mute submission on her bosom. The sweet grave look still lingered on her lips and brow, and nothing of fear, or terror, or disorder was there to tell of the awful scenes amid which her young life had passed away. Douglas held his breath, and looked, and looked, until he felt as if he were turning into stone. It was she herself—the Winifride of his early youth and passionate affection; the Winifride who had never flippantly allured or capriciously repelled him; the Winifride who, in her lofty calling and high-wrought enthusiasm, had ever most entirely possessed his love, even at the moment when she was most inflexibly rejecting it.

It was she herself, and it was his hand that had brought her there; and but for him she might still have been bright, and beautiful, and glad as ever. He was her murderer; and though the law condemned him not, and the world would never tax him with it, he knew that Heaven had pronounced him guilty.

“Murderer, dost thou dare to look upon thy victim?” Douglas started, so awfully were the words an echo to his thoughts, that for a second he almost felt as if the dead had risen to convict him of his crime; but it was a living man who stood before him, and gazed upon him with a face more terrible in its rebuking calmness than the wildest energy of passion could possibly have made it. Well, indeed, might he shrink from that glance of stern endurance, for it was the father of Winifride who stood before him, a man grey-haired before his time, and older by twenty years than when he had seen him last with his daughter in his arms. The conscience-stricken youth stood for a moment beneath that stony look, unable either to meet or to evade it, and then sinking on his knees, he struck his hand violently against his breast, exclaiming, “Curse me not, Elliot! *I knew not what I did.*”

In a brief but terrible instant the father, bereaved and childless, looked irresolute; but one glance at his

pale child as she lay upon her bier, one wordless prayer to the Great Forgiver of all injustice who dwelt in the silent tabernacle on the altar, and then with a mighty effort he laid his hand upon his nephew's head and said, "I do forgive you. May God forgive you also; and may the day at length arrive when (though I can hardly think it) you shall be able to feel you can forgive yourself."

Then, as if not daring to trust himself to utter another word, Elliot left the church, set his hat firmly on his head, and strode away, far from the presence of his guilty nephew, whom he never was destined to meet again in this world. Douglas, on his part, waited another instant to recover himself before he staggered back, as well as he could, to his own abode: and what happened afterwards he never rightly knew; for a burning fever deprived him of his senses, and for many weeks it seemed impossible that his brain could ever recover the shock it had received. Youth, however, and a good constitution, carried him through all; and at length, almost against his own wishes, and certainly against the prophecies of his medical attendants, he walked forth from his sick chamber a sadder, but unhappily not as yet a wiser man. For not even then had remorse taken for him the form of practical repentance, and therefore it weighed almost unendurably upon him, by turns wearied him or made him sad, consuming him with the desire to get rid of it and of himself, and rendering his life for many long years afterwards one vain effort to forget.

Happily for him he did not succeed. No noisy mirth could hush the still small voice of conscience; no pursuit of riches or of worldly honours could drive the gloomy image from his mind; and when at length he found the effort fruitless, and that, however exciting or however absorbing, neither business nor pleasure had power to efface the memory of that fatal day which had set the mark of Cain upon his brow, then, and not till then, did he cease to struggle with his own soul, and to

suffer it to seek in prayer and in repentance the peace of which sin had robbed it, and which therefore nothing but sorrow for sin could ever restore. And so at last he became a truly heart-humbled and repentant man; and when after many years had passed away, and he returned to Ostend once more, the oldest inhabitants of the city had either forgotten his story altogether, or at all events failed to recognise the hot-headed handsome youth who was its ill-omened hero, in the grey-haired, dim-eyed man, bowed down alike by sorrow and by age, who might be seen from morn till dewy eve lingering in their beautiful old parish-church; and thus they never guessed, that if he had come to lay his bones among them, it was chiefly for the sad privilege of passing the evening of his days near the tombs of the young heroic girls, whose early death had doubtless been intended alike as the reward of their all but angelic virtue, and as the terrible chastisement of his own selfish and unbridled passions.



